

Shin-Ya Goikeda

COMPOSED AND PROVIDED BY

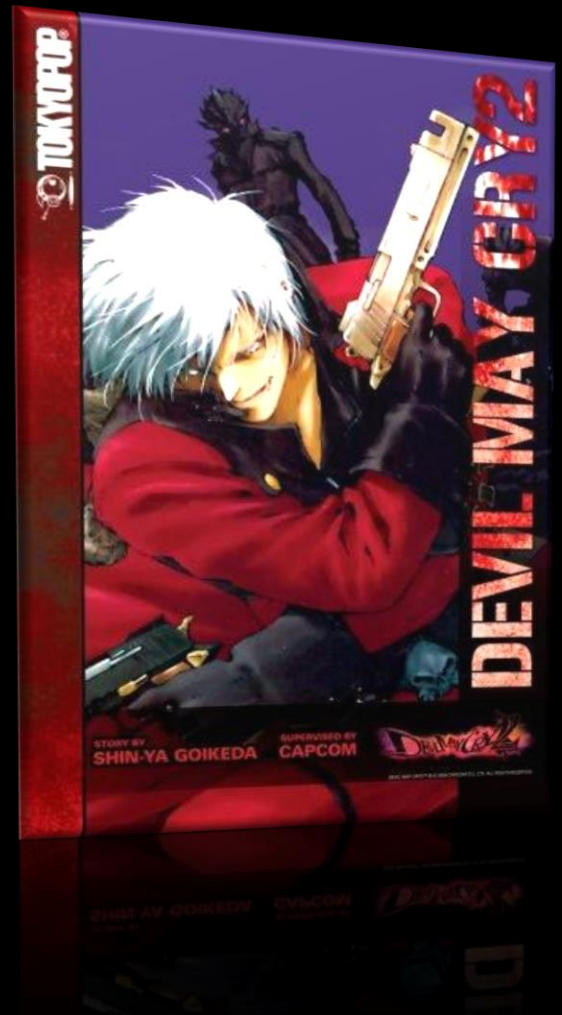
Adelle Marie Rulli

Devil May Cry Volume 2

The Original Devil May Cry

VERGIL

The Real Devil May Cry Unity



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Contents

Prologue	3
Phase 1	9
PART 1	9
Phase 1	19
PART 2	19
Phase 1	37
PART 4	37
Phase 2	47
PART 1	47
Phase 2	59
PART 2	59
Phase 2	70
PART 3	70
Phase 2	83
PART 4	83
Phase 3	97
PART 1	97
Phase 3	108
PART 2	108
Phase 3	122
PART 3	122
Phase 3	137
PART 4	137
Phase 4	148
PART 1	148
Phase 4	159
PART 2	159
Phase 4	169
PART 3	169
Phase 4	183
PART 4	183
Epilogue	197



Devil May Cry 2

Story by:
Shin-Ya Goikeda

Supervised by:
CAPCOM



Prologue

The bombastic argument on the other side of the door shook the dust from the ancient volumes racked dutifully in the library. Battling voices drew nearer as black feet appeared at the bar of light beneath the door. "Stop! You don't have permission to go in there!" The first voice had the hollow wheeze of an elderly man. It contrasted sharply with the vibrant tones of the young woman who pushed the door open. "I have permission to go anywhere," the woman said, waving a permit in the old man's face. "They didn't tell me anything was off limits. Besides, can't you feel something in here? I felt it in the hall. This place has a weird vibe." The woman brushed a curly strand of red hair aside and pointed at a thick wooden door on the other side of the library. Multiple locks braided the portal, each adorned with charms and incantations. "Whatever it is, it's coming from there. We can't just sit around and wait for something to happen." "Miss Beryl!" the old man sputtered. Judging by his wardrobe, he was clearly under the impression that high priests were supposed to look like storybook wizards, although she reckoned he couldn't quite pull off the flowing beard. It took him a while to crank out a sentence due to the "whispery wizard" voice he

employed. Beryl wasn't impressed. "Not a single trespasser has entered this vault in more than two thousand years," the old man continued breathily. "Your reputation precedes you, Miss Beryl. We don't doubt your skills or intuition, but observe." The priest reached out and stroked one of the charms. A small tuft of smoke crackled into existence at the point of contact, and he quickly withdrew his hand. "The more wicked the person who touches these charms, the stronger the reaction," he explained, sucking on his fingers. "So you can imagine what would happen if a demon messed with one of these locks. Perhaps your fears are groundless. Just this once," he added hastily. "Fears? Groundless? You really don't get it, do you? The demons I've fought were careful and cunning. They could get around these charms with their eyes closed!" Beryl's eyes widened as she unleashed the tirade. The old man was appalled. "You meant these charms?" But Beryl's attentions were elsewhere. She unconsciously fingered her collarbone, tracing along an old scar. The wound pulsed with heat, a sensation that only occurred when she was near the object of her search. Suddenly her instincts kicked in and she shoved the old man aside. Almost simultaneously, Beryl whipped a huge

anti-tank rifle from its cradle on her back. The high priest found this beyond the pale. "What are you doing? I'm a priest! You can't use violence on a priest!" "If you want to live, shut up and hide!" she hissed. Beryl gripped the rifle in both hands and swung it around to cover the door. The old man considered his options and galloped out of the library as quickly as he could. "I'm ready for you. Come on out!" Beryl unleashed a volley at the enchanted portal with a roar. But the silver bullets arced away from their target at the last moment, their trajectories tweaked by a mysterious force. The tiny missiles clattered uselessly to the stone floor. Beryl had been expecting something like that. She fired another three shots at the door. This time they embedded themselves in the wood. "Orrruuuuuunnn." An uncanny voice howled from behind the door, which swelled as if sucking in a lungful of air.



The movement popped the charms from their moorings. Suddenly, the wood shattered. The scar on Beryl's collarbone grew hotter. "Come on out, demon! I know you're there!" Beryl squeezed off a few rounds into the dark hole where the door used to be. The rifle's report echoed from the library's flagstone walls. Beryl swung the barrel around, looking for a target. Her chest heaved anxiously. Where are you? Adrenaline washed over her, intensifying the heat in her collarbone. Beryl felt her fighting spirit burn stronger. Heat. Burn. Suddenly, Beryl flung

herself toward the side of the room, rolling into a combat stance. A giant flower of fire bloomed where she had been standing. The rolling flames grew into a white-hot column, linking the floor and ceiling with eldritch energy. It was somehow more than fire—a hellfire from the demon world, the work of magic. Beryl smiled. It was exactly the move she would have made if she were a demon looking for an opening gambit. "Orrruuuuuunnn." The blistering stench of decay accompanied the demonic howl. The atmosphere condensed, thick with a soul-crushing something that sought to etch despair into human minds. Beryl willed herself to ignore the mounting fear and caught a lucky break. "There you are!" She leveled her rifle and shot two more rounds. Silver bullets ripped through the darkness and punched through the black demonic shape she'd spied out of the corner of her eyes. "Orrruuu-!" The roar broke off suddenly, replaced by the thunderous clatter of shaking flagstones. The library heaved violently. Beryl wobbled in place uncertainly. The exaggerated vibrations made it hard to think coherently. An unexpected yelp escaped from her lips. She had no place to run. Beryl clinched her jaw and fell to one knee. The rumbling shook a rain of dust from the rafters, but she managed to catch sight of a dark shape slithering through the rubble. It was close enough to hit with her eyes closed. Beryl brought her rifle to bear and waited for the right moment. "Orrruuuuuunnn!" The howl tore through the air once more as a tarry mass emerged from the cloud of dust. "Not

today, chief." Beryl unloosed a volley at the beast. An inhuman scream rang out in pain. The shadow was bigger than any man, rolling with malevolent fury. Beryl adjusted her stance and noticed that she had shot off the demon's wings. The creature regarded her dryly and let out a foul laugh. Its back bubbled with wet flesh, which grew into replacement wings. It had regenerated almost instantaneously. And then Beryl realized that she was alone. The demon had slunk back into the depths of the earth; the violent tremors must have been the carving of a tunnel. The woman leaned on her depleted rifle. She could do nothing else but gawp awkwardly. Beryl let her rifle clatter to the ground and surveyed her surroundings. Not only had the library been utterly destroyed, but so had the temple itself. She couldn't see a single living soul. The wizened priest was either fleet of foot or dead beneath the rubble. "Looks like you got away again," she muttered. The old scars no longer burned or ached, but failure made her heart heavy. She found herself crying. But it wasn't the end. It was just the beginning.

Phase 1

PART 1

Some things cannot be seen even under the burning eye of the sun. Those who know the reality of these things find them while the world is sleeping; these people rise at dusk to live in the night. They make their way under the artificial lights of the city. It is another life altogether, always living under a black sky.

There is a shop where these kinds of people congregate.

The name of the shop: Devil May Cry.

"Give me a break, Dante. You know this isn't the time to be picky, right?" Enzo punctuated each word with an exaggerated gesture. He was a small, animated man, well known in the underworld. Judging by his tailored suits, he made a decent living as an informant, presumably by knowing precisely how far to try a man's patience.

"I don't know what you don't like about this job," Enzo continued, "but you haven't been getting decent work recently, right? Here I am, offering you a job even though you're complaining that all the work has dried up. Don't you know how wonderful I am?"

"You never let me forget." Dante sighed dispassionately. He sat on a leather sofa that he'd stolen, and his long legs formed a bridge to a large desk. "I've only ever taken work that interests me. That's my policy."

Dante had pioneered an underground movement the underworld called Devil Hunting. More and more freelance mercenaries were trying to get in on the action, although none compared to the original. Dante cut a striking figure with his silver hair and piercing eyes. Yet he exuded a childish quality that disarmed his enemies and made him approachable to strangers. Few of those strangers had the stamina to put up with his schtick long enough to become his friends.

"Yeah, I know all about that policy of yours. But that doesn't mean all you're gonna get is demon work, you know." Enzo rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "You need to learn to be more flexible, my friend. Aren't you behind in your rent?"

"I appreciate the offer, but really..."

"What does that mean?'But really'."

Enzo plopped on a nearby stool in a huff. Dante could be infuriating, but he was still the best in the business. Enzo scanned the room. None of the furniture or accessories matched. Strange antiques jostled up against a huge billiard table and modern lamps. Plush toy animal heads were mounted on the wall like hunting trophies. "Your shop is so weird."

He hopped off the stool and sauntered over to the pool table. It was only a matter of time until he hit on whatever it was that

would get Dante on the ball. "By the way, whatever happened to that beauty? You had a really pretty chick, didn't you?"

Dante raised an eyebrow but showed no further signs of life.

Enzo lit up inside. This was the tack to take. "What was her name again? You know, the girl? Where did she go?"

"Who knows?" Dante said flatly.

"What a waste. Hey, did she run away?"

Dante swung two large pistols toward a large mirror on one wall. Brandishing weapons always made Enzo shut up, but this time there was an edge behind the act. His nerves had been slowly fraying over the past several days. Something was in the air. Dante had passed the time with the work that Enzo had brought him, but now he knew that his energies had to be focused on whatever was going to happen.

Dante studied his reflection in the mirror, his gaunt face tucked behind two crossed pistols. The hilt of his beloved sword-he called it Rebellion-peeked over one shoulder. This was it. It would start now.

"Hey, Dante!"

"Wait. The phone is going to ring."

An old-fashioned telephone rattled away on his desk. Dante swiftly lifted the handset to his ear and felt his tension drawing away. An unmistakable password emanated from the receiver.

"Okay. I'll take the job."

Dante broke out into a charming smile and sprung from his chair as though propelled by a gust of wind. His pistols were back in their holsters, ready for action. He bolted from the shop.

"Hey! Wait for me!" Enzo toddled after him. The flustered middleman had never been to the scene of a job, but Enzo wasn't about to let Dante take off without figuring out how to make a dime off it.

"You need a ride, right? I can take you in my car!"

The two men disappeared into the night, the words "Devil May Cry" flickered ominously in red neon behind them. It was more than the name of the shop. It was Dante's nickname. The name the demons feared.

"So, then. Where is this job of yours?" Enzo asked cheerfully while gripping the steering wheel.

Dante muttered the name of an old temple that had recently been all over the newspapers. The structure had mysteriously collapsed, killing several monks and priests.

"Are you kidding?" Enzo took his eyes off the road long enough to give Dante the once-over. "They say that place was destroyed by demons or something."

Dante pulled his pistols out and set about disassembling them. "And now it seems a winged lizard man walks among us. It's the perfect job for me, don't you think?"

Dante had rebuilt Ebony and Ivory with his own hands. The twin guns were originally the product of a skilled gunsmith he'd been close to, but he rarely thought about her now. Dante himself had modified and improved the weapons until they were virtually an extension of his own being. The pistols had sent many powerful demons to their end.

"Eyes on the road, Enzo! This is delicate work I'm doing here." Dante finished greasing up the guns and quickly reassembled them. They were chunky and cartoonish, augmented to avoid overheating under his rapid shooting style. Cleaning and preparing the weapons felt like meditating to Dante. The final pieces snapped into place with a satisfying click. "I'm ready."

"Almost there," Enzo said. He plastered a map across the steering wheel and tried to navigate and drive simultaneously. "Take a look at this. We're supposed to be on this road here, but I don't understand the map."

"Here is fine. Stop the car."

The car bounced over a pothole and came to a stop. Dante leapt out of the vehicle. Enzo pushed his head out the window. "You really gonna be okay getting off here?"

"Something's coming!"

Gunfire roared as Dante squeezed off a volley of rounds in Enzo's direction. A black shadow collapsed just inches behind the middleman, whose eyes and mouth opened wide with shock.

"You'll be safer heading back to the city," Dante advised. "Sorry, but it looks like you won't be making a profit tonight."

Enzo squeaked out an unintelligible response and pulled his head back in the window. A moment later the car rocketed down the narrow road in reverse.

Dante swung his gaze across the fallen shadow. "You can't all be small fries. So, where's the leader?"

A sepulchral whisper fluttered among the dry leaves scattered across the road. Dante felt the presence of something inhuman. The greatest Devil Hunter had found a place for his own battle. It was a moonless night.

Dante stepped further into the darkness without hesitation, but to his dismay no adversaries appeared. He casually strolled

deeper into the inky black. Nothing. No attack. No movement of any kind.

A kernel of suspicion formed in the back of his mind.

Having fought demons and similar creatures more times than he could remember, there were several things that Dante had come to understand. Above all, such monsters would always appear in groups. Small demons never enroached on the human world without support. The small fry that had threatened Enzo would be part of a larger, more powerful group.

Dante could sense nothing. He let his mind wander, stretching his senses, moving across the geography around him without the bother of actually relying on his eyes.

The rustle of swaying twigs.

The grains of sand kicked up as he stepped.

The persistent whine of Enzo's retreating car.

But no sign of the preternatural presence Dante had detected earlier. The area was almost unnaturally quiet. He suppressed a wave of mild anxiety and furrowed his brow.

Dante dove into the thicket in front of him without warning. His muscles moved as if of their own accord, compelled by years of instinct. He dashed through the undergrowth and leapt into a

yawing ravine. A dried-up riverbed snaked through the bottom of the chasm.

Skidding down one of the steep cliffs, Dante pushed against the rocky wall to steady his descent. Finally, he crashed heavily onto the ground.

The explosions started a moment later.

A rocky rain scrabbled against the riverbed amid peals of thunder that worked their way up the ravine. Dozens of scarlet eruptions bloomed one after the other. Dante whipped out his guns and danced around the explosions. Through the plumes of acrid smoke he could see that the mountain road above him was awash in a sea of fire.

It wasn't a magical attack. I've never heard of a demon using bombs. So it must be...Dante ducked and weaved his way through the bombardment. He briefly considered that he might have stumbled onto a construction site or blast quarry. But the military helicopter hovering just beyond the flames suggested otherwise.

Why didn't I hear it before? Dante couldn't see through the chopper's darkened canopy, but he knew it hadn't been hijacked by a demon. Its movement were too precise-what had seemed like a random blitz now revealed itself to be a careful bombing pattern. A demon would have been much more reckless.

Dante ran a hand through his silver hair. The bombs aren't falling here. I'm not their target.

Instead, explosions spiked up and down the mountain road on the cliff above, blasting chunks out of the earth. Debris crashed into the riverbed, which caught the occasional stray bomb. At the moment of each explosion, Dante caught a glimpse of shadowy figures leaping from the ground. The creatures looked like reptilian men-the same kind of low-level demon that had attacked Enzo.

Of course! They're underground. That's why I could feel them but not see them!

Most of the beasts died instantly, while others writhed in helpless agony. A select few lucky demons had escaped the bombings intact and were making their way to the relative protection of the dry riverbed. Straight toward Dante.

Dante brushed himself off and assumed one of his favorite menacing stances. It would be easy work to show these creatures why he was known as the greatest Devil Hunter alive.

But the volley of bullets that erupted a moment later didn't issue from Ebony and Ivory. Dante watched with astonishment as the approaching demons were cut down in a hail of gunfire. Each falling beast revealed a curious figure behind it. The men were

clad entirely in black coats and masks, and they carried massive rifles.

The squad moved from demon to demon, ruthlessly blowing away any creatures that retreated and slaughtering the wounded. It didn't take long for one of the men to notice Dante. He hollered to the others and pointed toward the mercenary. A moment later, the newcomers had Dante dead in their sights.

Dante counted about thirty men altogether. Not men, he amended. The figures emanated a cold, dark aura unique to the Underworld. The true Underworld. Although he couldn't see their faces, Dante knew the black uniforms masked demons within.

"Howdy," Dante stepped forward, hands on his pistols. "Demons fighting demons. Looks like this job just got a lot more interesting."

Phase 1

PART 2

It began with a single gunshot.

Or at least that's what it sounded like. Scores of bullets had erupted almost simultaneously. Dante coaxed a blistering barrage out of his massive guns, felling the nearest figure.

"No falling down on the job," Dante quipped. "We're just getting started."

The shadow slowly rose to its feet. Its body showed no signs of damage.

"I knew there was something strange about you guys." Dante leveled Ebony and Ivory at the man and pulled the triggers. Each pistol answered his request faithfully and spat out custom bullets with the force of a machine gun.

This time, the creature calmly allowed the barrage to sink into its flesh harmlessly while he strode toward Dante. The figure gripped the barrel of the rifle like a club and swiftly carved it through the air. Dante sprang backward in surprise as the weapon slashed through the space he had been standing in a moment before. The demon seemed to have crossed several meters in the space of a moment.

You're not the only one here with superhuman speed.

Dante leapt to one side and unleashed another swarm of bullets, knocking the figure to the ground once more. The black creature wasn't inhumanly fast after all. Instead, it had somehow extended its arms like rubbery tentacles. Its elbows stretched unnaturally, shooting across the battlefield within striking distance of Dante while keeping their host safely in the distance.

"What the hell are you?"

Dante ripped the massive sword Rebellion from his back and sped across the riverbed toward his opponent. "Show me your face!" He swung the blade, shearing the creature's black mask in two. The figure stumbled to the ground.

Dante gasped at the creature's true face.

It was unmistakably human.

His opponent appeared to be an expressionless boy in his late teens, young enough to have something childlike left about him. His eyes and mouth were slapped tightly shut. But Dante's attention was fixed on a plate embedded in the boy's forehead. Complicated etchings spiraled outward from a huge, unblinking eye centered on the plate.

The eyes was neither artificial nor organic, although it felt like a living thing. It swung its baleful gaze toward Dante, radiating a sickly wickedness.

"Don't stare at me like that, I'm shy!" Dante smashed the hilt of his sword into the orb. The boy immediately went limp. The demonic aura Dante had sensed earlier drained away. "Just a coarse imitation of life," he muttered.

Without the power of the strange eye, the boy's body began quickly decomposing. Blood poured from the bullet holes Dante had peppered across his body. His limbs grew dark and brittle with necrosis as the last of his life faded.

Possession. Dante grimaced.

The mercenary whirled to face the remaining figures, which had kept their distance during his skirmish with the boy. Each aimed a rifle at Dante and exuded a malevolent bloodlust. But for whatever reason, they made no signs of movement.

"If you're not gonna come to me, I guess I'll have to go to you!"

Dante kicked off the ground with both legs, his long red coat flapping wildly behind him like a tail. Rebellion snaked through the air toward its prey before the black figures loosed the first volley.

"Argh!" The first swing tore through the nearest demon from shoulder to hip. Dante deftly altered the upswing. Some unearthly power might be animating the warriors, but Rebellion sliced through them as easily as any human.

Whatever force controlled the throbbing eyes had no concern for the safety of its hosts. Dante spun through the crowd like a bloody cyclone, but the unfolding horror had no effect on the survivors. His remaining adversaries simply crushed their fallen comrades underfoot as they pressed their attack. Each demon sprayed bullets indiscriminately, then switched to knives.

Dante was growing frustrated. No matter how many assailants he sliced open or crippled, another rose up to replace it. "Don't be so stubborn! Be good little boys and go to sleep!"

Realization washed over Dante and his eyes rolled upward. These aren't the ones I've after, either. He'd been wasting his time with two warring demon clans. There's a third party. Something different. Something more powerful.

Dante thought back to the message he had received at his shop. "Your enemies are devils." The message had sent him dashing to the temple ruins. He hadn't anticipated more than one faction. Dante grumpily finished off the remaining attackers with a few choice strokes. The ravine was silent aside from the reassuring whup whup whup of the black helicopter.

"I'd forgotten about you," Dante murmured.

The chopper's mysterious pilot hadn't forgotten about Dante. The helicopter spewed a barrage of machine gun fire in his direction, but Dante easily evaded the onslaught.

"Points for style, but I'm not in the mood to appreciate it." Dante coaxed Ebony and Ivory into action. The riverbed ached with the tumultuous conversation of bullets as each opponent clarified his stance. The helicopter soon emptied its magazines and switched to napalm.

Dante danced around the attacks and focused on his real problem. Something was interfering with his senses. Something more than the helicopter; something more explicitly evil. A palpable atmosphere swelled around him like a balloon near to bursting. He had felt similar sensations before, in the presence of the demonic Underworld.

Without warning, the helicopter burst into flames. Wreckage arced across the black sky as its remaining weapon stores exploded in an impressive chain reaction. A wave of heat slammed into the riverbed, hollowing out the ground and reducing the vegetation to ash.

Dante struck a dynamite pose on the scarred earth. He had emerged from the explosion unscathed, Ebony and Ivory at the ready. He fixed his gaze on the spot where the helicopter had been—an empty patch of air that seemed to ooze nothingness.

"As far as greetings go, that one might have been over the top," Dante said aloud. "And on top of making me wait, you give me unnecessary warm-up exercises. I'm gonna make you pay for that."

Enormous black wings unfolded from the nothing above him. Twin eyes peered out unsympathetically from between them. A female form grew in the space below, anchored by a pair of sharp talons.

Dante pulled himself up to his full height. It's going to be a long night. His guns roared to life as he and the succubus flung themselves at each other.

"Bring it on!"

"Stop the car! Stop!"

Enzo slammed on the brakes at the unexpected command. He had been careening down the dark mountain road at breakneck speed, familiar enough with Dante's lifestyle to know that he'd be better off in the relative safety of the city.

But the scream threw him. It was a woman's voice, startling enough that his reaction had thrown the car into an uncontrolled spin as the wheels locked. Enzo gripped the steering wheel tightly, and finally the vehicle came to a stop. The livid little middleman crawled out of the car and wandered into the floodlit space provided by its headlights.

"Wh-Who's there?" he stammered.

"It was me," a smooth voice responded. "If you're well enough to complain, then you must be all right." A tall woman emerged

from the moonless night, her odd form illuminated by the headlights.

Enzo didn't know whether to be more taken aback by her presence or her fashion sense.

The woman wore a black leather suit strategically covered with protective steel plates. A huge rifle the size of a vacuum cleaner nestled on her back. In short, she looked like a mercenary.

"You just came from the top of the mountain, right? What's happening up there?"

Enzo had been in the game far too long to let a little near-death experience get the better of his natural instincts. "Information, huh? Let's talk price," he said with a grin. "Let me guess; you're interested in the temple."

"Something like that. What's going on up there?"

"Why should I tell you?" Enzo had to tilt his head back to look the woman in the eye.

Finally, she caught on. The newcomer fished a leather coin purse from a bag hanging at her waist and handed it to him.

"That's a deposit. When I know how much your information is worth, I'll pay you the rest."

Enzo pocketed the purse with a wide smile. "Why don't we start with names? I'm Enzo."

"I'm Beryl. I'm a Devil Hunter."

Enzo's smile evaporated. "Devil Hunter?"

"Yep. Don't laugh; it's not unusual in this day and age."

Enzo regarded Beryl uncertainly. She didn't look like somebody on Dante's level. Their gazes locked for a few moments as Enzo considered this new information.

"What's the matter? I already paid you a deposit."

The woman had the same scintilla of patience as Dante, at any rate. "Well..."

Enzo's hesitation was cut off by a blinding light that stabbed the sky near the mountaintop. An explosion soon followed along with a thunderous heat wave. Enzo and Beryl dove into the car in unison as the shockwave from the exploding helicopter raced down the mountainside.

"Dante, you nimrod!" Enzo bellowed.

Beryl's eyes widened. "Dante? Did you just say Dante? As in Dante the Devil Hunter?"

"Uh..."

Beryl urgently gripped the little man by the lapels. "Where is Dante now? Tell me!"

"What?"

"I commissioned him for this job! I'm the person who summoned Dante to the mountain!"

Phase 1

Part 3

"Can't this thing go any faster?"

Enzo and Beryl were rushing back up the mountain in Enzo's car, which had been damaged by the helicopter's shockwave. Not that it was in great shape to begin with.

"Calm down! This is about as fast as it goes." Enzo had agreed to take Beryl up the mountain once he'd realized he didn't actually have any information for her after all. It was either that or return her deposit, and Enzo would rather face up to another demon than issue a refund.

"Dante," he muttered. "No matter how far I get, you always drag me back. Poverty is a harsh mistress."

Dante was finding this particular life-or-death battle a little more trying than usual life-or-death battles through which he usually waltzed.

The she-devil standing before him was advanced well beyond the underlings he had dispatched before the helicopter blew up. Its eyes shone with intelligence, indeed it probably had the rare

ability to speak in human tongues. The beast was able to generate a steady stream of fireballs and also appeared capable of twisting space to move short distances without warning. Dante reckoned it could take on a small army without breaking a sweat.

But then, so was Dante himself. "What's the matter? Scared already?"

The mercenary had already shredded the demon's wings and hacked off its hooked claws. The creature was cut off from its regenerative powers while in the human world, allowing Dante to inflict some incredible damage. Nevertheless, the she-devil was pushing him to his limit.

The devil howled mournfully. Following the death of the King of the Underworld, it had rallied a personal army amid the chaos and broken through to the human world in hopes of swift victory over easy prey. The silver and red blur that now attacked it had been completely unexpected. Despite destroying the temple and feeding on scores of weak humans, it was on the verge of despair.

Of course, Dante knew nothing of this background. All he knew was that he had once defeated the demon's king and would soon do the same to the creature itself. He stabbed at the beast with Rebellion.

The devil cried out, it's back flush against the cliff face. The succubus charged Dante. It focused its little remaining magic into a broken claw, raising it high from a killing blow. The Devil Hunter was less than impressed.

"Good try, but pointless." He flashed Rebellion once more, cutting off the demon's howl at its source. The she-devil's head rolled onto the riverbed. But the creature's body barreled forward under the momentum. Yellow bile gushed from its open wound. Dante watched the creature crash to the ground out of the corner of his eye.

"Got some exercise today after all." He wiped the blood off Rebellion and returned the sword to its sheath on his back. Then Dante picked up the remains of the devil and bellowed into its oozing neck. "Tell me. What are you after?"

But the demon couldn't respond; Dante had severed its vocalcords.

"It'd be easier if you just came out and told me like a good little demon," he said coldly. "I'm not fond of torture, but I won't hold back if it's necessary." The headless demon began to shudder in fear. It was about to learn why Dante's nicknamed Devil May Cry.

"There he is. There!"

Beryl peered into the darkness from the safety of the car. The road had exposed a stretch of the scarred ravine beside it, including a silver-topped figure standing on the edge of a crater.

Enzo pointed out Dante excitedly.

"Thanks. I'll get out here," Beryl said.

"Wait! You don't know what's out there..."

Enzo moved to keep her in the car, but it was too late. Beryl had flung herself from the moving vehicle and landed delicately on her feet. She was already dashing through the thicket toward the ravine.

Enzo's plea was swallowed by the darkness as Beryl pushed forward. Already she could feel a subtle burning in her body. Her old wound throbbed with heat; she knew the devil was near. I'm not going to let you get away this time!

Bitter memories of the temple's annihilation ran through her mind. She could have sworn she'd mortally wounded that demon. But it had shrugged off the attack, escaping beneath the earth. Beryl knew that demons with such power were rare.

The searing pain in her chest superseded all other concerns, channeling within her a ferocious rage. Dante and the headless demon came into view as she descended the ravine. Beryl slid down the cliff face, whipping out her rifle and catching the beast in her sights. "This time I'll finish you."

Beryl fired off five shots in quick succession. The rifle had been designed to bring down tanks. Its ordnance could punch through steel plates, and although it wasn't the most accurate weapon on the market, it was lethal enough to take out its target through sheer force upon impact.

"Hey! What kind of greeting is that?" Dante spun around and fired off five rounds of his own. His bullets tore into those already in the air, raining gunpowder and casings onto the dry riverbed. The impacts created a shockwave that knocked Beryl to the ground.

Enzo appeared from behind her. "What did I tell you? That's why you need to cool your head!" he shouted breathlessly. "Only a fool picks a fight with Dante."

Beryl staggered to her feet. The suffocating pain in her chest had subsided. She glanced woozily around the riverbed, trying to regain her senses. And then she saw him. Silver hair flapping in the wind. That ridiculous red coat. A cheeky smile and two of the biggest pistols Beryl had ever seen.

"It can't be!" Finally she realized what she had done. Her obsession had pushed Dante from her vision as she focused on the demon. Luckily, he was unharmed.

"What a way to say hello," Dante muttered. "A little too hardcore for me, though."

Beryl stared at him, her mouth agape.

"Your job had been completed, babe. Why don't you verify it with your own eyes?" Dante winked and gave Beryl a light pat on the back.

And with that, the night's commotion came to an abrupt end.

"Well, for the time being, let me apologize."

Beryl was mortified. She bowed her head slightly to Dante, who seemed to relish the attention. The trio had lit a makeshift fire inside the temple ruins and cleared out a suitable space for relaxing. In fact, the entire area was essentially a vacant plot of land.

"I've got to finish my mission," Beryl said. "I'm sorry I got you mixed up in it."

"I don't mind missions," Dante said lightheartedly. He inspected Ebony and Ivory by the firelight. He had been intrigued by Beryl's story and wanted to hear more; she was one of the few people to attack him and emerge unscathed.

"What was the demon doing here?"

Beryl screwed up her face. "It's a long story. And frankly you're not going to believe it."

"Try me," Dante said. "That devil got away in the confusion. I hadn't even beaten any information out of it."

"I'm after a statue called the Beastheads."

Dante and Enzo leaned forward intently. The small middleman had fetched some water from the trunk of the battered car.

Tossing back their drinks beside the fire, listening to Beryl tell her story, the pair couldn't help but feel like they were camping.

"I've been chasing the statue for years. Long before I became a Devil Hunter. I was dealing with demons."

"What is this 'Beastheads?' Enzo asked.

"Exactly what it sounds like-a small statue with three beastly faces. Each head is supposed to look like a dog or a wolf or something."

"Supposed to?"

Beryl looked down at her shoes, feeling awkward. "Well, I haven't actually ever seen it myself. The statue was smuggled out of the Underworld after a war two thousand years ago."

"Demons." Dante was uncharacteristically attentive.

"Yep, I ran into little situations a few years ago, and now I can sense the aura of the Beastheads. I've used that ability to track it down."

"And to suck unwitting strangers into your nonsense, like you did with me!" Enzo spat.

"I'm sorry." Beryl made a face at the little man before continuing. "Anyway, I was in the temple when it was destroyed. I had tracked the Beastheads to its treasure vault. But the demons had already beaten me to it. That succubus Dante was wrestling with had beaten me there."

"I wasn't wrestling, I was winning!" protested Dante. "And anyway, it looks like it got the best of you."

"I was unacquainted with the surroundings," Beryl retorted. "More importantly, I didn't want to argue with the people trying to cordon off the mountain."

"So you hired Dante to be the opening act!" Enzo cried with realization.

"I was desperate! If I lost the Beastheads here, I might have spent decades chasing hopeless leads trying to get back on track."

Silence fell on the camp as Beryl's story came to an end. Enzo handed her another drink by way of truce.

Finally, Dante broke the silence. "Where is this Beastheads now?"

"There's no way to know for sure. But my senses tell me it was probably-"

"Taken by that devil, I see." Dante brushed off his pants and stood up. "That's as far as your story goes."

Dante's eyes had a familiar gleam that troubled Enzo. It was an expression that usually meant a lot of risk with little chance of money changing hands. "What are you going to do, Dante? Don't tell me you're thinking of going after that demon!"

"I accepted the invitation that brought us this far. Not sticking it out would be a shame. Besides, the Beastheads is an item from the Underworld, and that means this is a job I can't refuse."

"Here we go again." Enzo rolled his eyes. "Why don't you stop showing so much interest in these unprofitable occult jobs and get your priorities in order? I've got a nice list of gigs that could make us-er, I mean you-some series cash."

"Sorry, Enzo. That's just the kind of guy I am."

Beryl had watched the transaction from the sidelines for long enough. "Hey!" she said crossly. That got their attention.

"Dante, my commission for you is over. Don't meddle in this thing any further. Just to be clear-don't get involved in any way. Tracking down the Beastheads is my life's mission, and I won't have either of you two interfering in that."

Her beautiful facial features morphed into a stern grimace. Beryl stood up and slung the anti-tank rifle over her back. "Thank you

for doing what I asked you to do. But don't even think about going after the Beastheads!"

DEVIL MAY CRY 2

デビル・メイ・クライ 2

Phase 1

PART 4

That night, strange rumors raced through the city.

"I heard it was the shape of a gigantic bird soaring through the sky."

"They said you could hear its suffering from miles away."

"It fell somewhere, but nobody knows where."

Most rumors were relegated to tall tales being told at the city's cheaper watering holes. Yet even the upstanding citizens who didn't visit the mercenary haunts had heard about the giant bat creature seen on the mountain the night the temple was destroyed. Nobody had any way to be sure what was truth and what were tricks of the night.

Until Ducas.

Or Ducas the Rat, as he was better known throughout the city's seedy underbelly. Ducas was a low-level street punk without much to his name. At least, not until the night he came across an event that would change his destiny forever.

Ducas' job was mainly extortion. He preferred to call it "donation." On a typical night, Ducas would prowl the streets looking for affluent pedestrians to ask for donations "in good faith". But some nights were slower than others, and on this particular night Ducas returned home with empty pockets.

Six hours on the street had produced not one dime. Not that the higher-ups would care about that. They'd still expect their donations, which meant that he was in the red. Which in turn meant he was going hungry until tomorrow.

The city itself seemed to sneer at him as he skulked home. Warm lights flickered from the little bars along the street, out drunken laughter spilled.

I had plans to be in one of those bars tonight, he thought ruefully. Ducas heard his stomach growl. It wasn't fair. He just wanted a cheap meal. He didn't have a high tolerance for alcohol and wasn't a glutton, either. Ducas just wanted to live modestly and have fun-but he didn't want to work for it.

Ducas continued along the street until he came to a crooked staircase at the end of a dark alley. He climbed to the second floor and entered his apartment. The Spartan single room was somehow messy. A small bed peeked above a layer of discarded clothes like a boat sinking at sea.

If he couldn't eat, at least he could sleep. Ducas flung himself on the bed.

I've been in this city for three years now. Why can't I catch a break? Just one chance, that's all a guy like me needs. Bam! I'd come up from the gutter.

Like many in the criminal world, Ducas believed that all his failures came down to a string of bad luck. It wasn't his fault he lost all his money gambling or seemed stuck in his current situation.

Man, if a little luck came my way, who knows what I could do?

Ducas curled into the fetal position, the better to clutch his growling stomach with. He'd never gotten used to going to bed hungry, even though it was hardly a rare event. For a while he'd been able to skate by on credit at various bars and restaurants, but by now he had abused his privilege so often that he was banned from most shops. He wasn't dubbed "the Rat" for nothing.

Ducas decided to abandon himself to dreams.

There'll definitely be something good waiting for me tomorrow.

He was half right.

CRASH!

A terrible noise tore Ducas from his fitful sleep. He opened one eye and was so dumbfounded that he found himself unable to speak.

His roof was gone. So was one of his walls. It was a good one, too, with a quaint little window. Alas, the mess on his floor remained.

"What the...?" Ducas noticed that his bed was half buried under rubble. "What's happening?"

Surprisingly, none of this was the unlucky part.

Ducas howled dumbly.

Something howled back. It was weak and pitiful, like a wounded animal. "Uroooo!"

The mess on the floor undulated and slowly broke apart. A dark object snaked out from the rubble pathetically. With a start, Ducas realized it was a hand. He slunk to the far end of his bed and looked on blankly.

The hand collapsed limply. After a moment, Ducas summoned the courage to approach it. The extremity didn't look quite human, although it didn't really look like any animal he'd ever seen. Whatever was under the floor seemed to have taken its last breath?

Ducas gingerly touched the hand. It was cold and clammy, yet covered in black fur. Up close, it looked more like a paw than a hand. It gripped something tightly in its digits.

"I'm going to take a look at that," Ducas whispered hoarsely.

"Don't come back to life or anything, okay? I won't hurt you."

Ducas peeled the fingers from the object one by one, revealing a small statue. It had three lion heads. Or jackals. Dogs, maybe.

It was delicate, small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. Even Ducas could recognize its superior craftsmanship. "Why are you carrying this?" he asked.

I bet I could sell this for a lot, he thought. It was usually the first thing to go through his mind whenever he came across something new. He turned the statue around, examining it against the glow of the city lights.

...potential?

"What?" Ducas jumped at the voice. He quickly scanned his room, but the hand remained inert. There was nobody around.

...own potential?

This time he was sure he'd heard a voice. It sounded like someone was asking him a question, but he couldn't see a living soul. Ducas clasped the statue to his chest and held his breath. He didn't feel fear. The voice was somehow encouraging. Almost like a divine revelation.

Dost thou desire to know thine own potential?

It wasn't a voice at all. It was a communication directly to his consciousness itself.

"Y-yeah," Ducas stuttered. "I wanna know. I wanna know what I can do!" he shouted into the night, oblivious to his missing wall and roof. His mind was on other things.

"I wanna know how far I can go!" he screamed again, clutching the statue even tighter. "Tell me! Show me my potential!"

Looking back on it, Ducas would identify the moment as his Faustian bargain. But for now, he knew nothing aside from a burning desire to attain his destiny.

A collection of strange men had somehow entered his apartment; they now surrounded Ducas. The figures wore black leather jackets and shrouded their faces behind unsettling masks.

"Who are you?"

The figures lifted Ducas into the air and tossed him through the missing wall.

"What the hell are you doing?!"

Being flung down two stories snapped Ducas back to his old self. But the anger welling up inside of him died out as quickly as it came when the figures separated to reveal an additional visitor to the room.

"Boss?" Ducas could scarcely believe his eyes. "What are you doing here, boss?"

The dark figures flanked a portly gentleman with a gentle face. His thinning hair was hardened into place thanks to a generous application of hairspray. He wore a stylish suit from a bygone

era, reinforcing the image of a kindly grandfather. But everyone who knew him would say that appearances could be deceiving.

This was "Cold-blooded Chen," so named for his tendency to ignore all sense of morality, custom, or taboo where money was concerned. He had amassed a generous fortune at the expense of countless lives. Chen had risen to take control of the criminal underworld in recent years, making a number of enemies and an even greater number of fearful underlings.

"Ho ho! Who are you? If you call me 'boss,' you must be Family," Chen said. His voice had a rich sibillance.

"I'm Ducas," he said uncertainly. "I collect donations in this neighborhood."

Ducas realized he was slouching and brought himself to attention. He had only ever seen Chen from afar at regional meetings, and had certainly never spoken with him before. Although he had heard the same rumors as everyone else. Ducas wasn't afraid of Chen. Instead, he regarded him as a sort of king. Ducas felt his nerves burn with anxiety.

"Ho ho! You're one of the Family, all right. My luck is good indeed." Chen flashed a smile so wide it threatened to cut his face in half. "Did you look beneath the rubble to see the nature of your guest?" He indicated the Black Hand.

"No, sir." Ducas trembled. "I'm a coward, sir." He felt as if Chen was capable of peering into his mind. What will happen if I tell a lie? Just thinking about it frightened him.

"Excellent. In that case, I'd like you to make a promise with me."

"Anything, boss!"

"Tell no one what you saw tonight. And you yourself are to forget these events as quickly as possible. Do you understand?"

"Of course, boss!"



Chen nodded, satisfied by the speedy response. "Excellent. Tonight, you can stay in a special room I've prepared for you. Consider it an apology for disrupting your home. Will you accept?"

"Yes, sir!"

Chen gestured to one of his bodyguards and instructed him to escort Ducas to a nearby hotel owned by the Family. After the pair left, the aged crime boss turned his attention back to the rubble.

"Ho ho! We took care of things without any commotion." Chen flashed a confident smile and signaled to the dark figures sifting through the debris. "How are things over there?"

The figures remained silent, but stepped aside to clear a path for Chen. Lying in the middle of the wreckage was the she-devil Dante had struggled with on the mountain.

Chen approached the demon without fear and began to examine the uncanny body. "Very interesting," he decided. "This must be a higher demon. Not like the dull underlings we've come across in the past."

He surveyed the demon like a chef perusing his ingredients. He measured the body, dug through its abdomen to examine its entrails, and even shaved off some hair with a knife for further consideration later. After an hour of exploration, Chen stepped

away from the corpse. He jovial face wore an expression of satisfaction.

"Ho ho! This has been a good harvest."

Chen narrowed his eyes and regarded the dark figures around him.

"Where is the object?"

The figures' masks occluded their expressions, but Chen somehow knew they were none the wiser.

"The statue is missing. Is it possible that our young Mister Ducas took it with him?"

Again the figures stood mute.

"I see. We must assume that Mister Ducas has the Beastheads. Ho ho!" Chen waddled out of the room with a sly chuckle. The figures followed him. Finally, he turned to face his flock. The nearest figure knelt down in front of him, awaiting orders.

"Let Mister Ducas swim free for a while yet. It will give us the opportunity to ascertain precisely what we are dealing with. Both the Beastheads itself and whoever else might be interested in it."

The black figures nodded slightly and vanished like the wind.

The strange night was at an end

Phase 2

PART 1

Dante emptied the shot glass and gazed out at the first pink rays of the sun peeking over the rooftops.

After Beryl had left the temple ruins, Dante had returned to his shop to unwind. He sat on the stone steps out front with a furrowed brow, lost in thought. He didn't know the true nature of the Beastheads. Even Beryl hadn't known-or at least hadn't admitted to knowing. However, there was one thing he had grasped immediately.

The Beastheads was a link to his father.

A link to his father's era, anyway. No man alive knew the secret to Dante's lineage, although many suspected he was touched by magic. None knew he was the son of the legendary Sparda, a dark knight of the demon world.

Dante ran a hand through his silver hair as he pondered his next move. Above him, the neon sign proclaiming his other name flickered in the dawn. Devil May Cry. The name that demons feared.

I supposed this means my battle isn't over.

Dante stood up, resolved. A cynical smile spread across his face as he tossed the empty glass into the air. He whipped out Ebony and Ivory with characteristic speed and fired a single

shot. The glass shattered before it hit the ground, sending a spray of sparkling glass raining onto the street.

Bring it on.

Whatever was happening, it was already underway.

Oblivious, the city woke with the rising sun, its denizens flooding the streets as they went about their daily routines. The first change didn't begin until the first stars poked through the sky at dusk.

"Again?! What the hell is up with that rat bastard tonight?"

The agitated voice was so loud that it flooded into the alley outside the bar. The watering hole offered little in the way of class or cleanliness, but instead focused its energies on alcohol, loose women, and various other sinful pursuits. Normally at this time, the last of the respectable customers would be leaving happy hour to head home, while the first of the evening's mercenaries wandered in to prepare for the long night ahead.

But tonight was different, Businessman and mercenary alike were rooted in place, eyes locked on a small card table that had been hastily installed in one corner. A young woman shuffled cards with a pained smile. She doled out a series of hands for the solitary man sitting at the table.

Ducas the Rat stroked the triple-headed pendant that hung around his neck and broke into a greasy smile. He had tried to

stay put in the hotel, but cabin fever got the better of him. And just as well. He was on a roll tonight. His new lucky charm had helped him rake in a small fortune in just under an hour.

"I'm going all in!" Ducas snaked out an arm around a small mountain of chips and moved them to the center of the table. He hadn't bothered to count his winnings yet, but it was obvious to everyone present that it surpassed the establishment's take this evening.

The dealer allowed her pained smile to collapse into a frown. "Perhaps we can take a quick break?" She dashed from the table without waiting for an answer. A square-shouldered brute the size of a small rhinoceros swept into the vacant position at the table.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, sir. Would you kindly step into the VIP room for a moment?"

Nobody would accuse Ducas of anything remotely approaching intelligence, even if they were in a charitable mood. But he had slunk through the lower rungs of the criminal underworld long enough to know that dive bar requests to visit the VIP room were generally invitations to a shakedown or a good, old-fashioned pummeling. Never a good thing.

"Let me save you time," Ducas said with a confidence he hadn't felt before picking up the charm. "I'm part of Chen's Family."

The goon stepped back awkwardly, suddenly nervous. "I'm so sorry, sir."

Ducas clutched the Beastheads with delight and watched the bouncer slink into the shadows. He spread his hands wide and addressed the throng of onlookers. "Come on, next round. Next round! I'm gonna work the house until it begs for mercy!"

"That's all we have to report about his situation."

"Ho ho. Very interesting." Chen sat in an overstuffed leather chair, sipping lemonade. He watched swans play in an artificial pond.

Every once in a while, minions scurried forward to deliver updates on various enterprises. This particular minion had rushed to Chen's opulent veranda with details about Ducas' uncharacteristic winning streak.

"The deal was by no means unskilled," the toady offered, staring politely at his own feet. "But it seemed as if Ducas could see her hand perfectly. He even beat the roulette wheel nine times out of ten."

Chen clasped his hands. "So it seems our Mister Ducas has found himself something more than a mere good luck charm. But let's not jump to conclusions just yet. It seems prudent to let him swim free for just a while longer. Don't you agree?"

Everyone always agreed with Chen.

The minion bowed lower before exiting the veranda, leaving his master alone in the warm glow of the evening. The swans skittered across the water as Chen mused to himself.

Chen had paid handsomely for the artificial pond and the pretense of southern comfort. His house was on the edge of the city, protected by high walls and bulletproof glass. Behind the grounds was a twisted maze of concrete and glass—a city millions called home. And Chen had mastery of most of it in the crepuscular hour. He was blessed with bursting coffers, wealth generated on the backs of countless victims and stooges. But it was somehow not enough.

Every evening, Chen came out to his veranda and watched his treasured swans drift gracefully in the pond. In these moments, his cheerful facade ebbed to reveal an underlying melancholy.

"You're there, aren't you? Come on, then. Come out where I can see you."

The growing shadows morphed into humanoid figures cloaked in black leather and hidden behind esoteric masks. The figures advanced toward the veranda without a sound.

Chen rose up to his full height. "We shall continue our observation of the Beastheads for now. You are to continue to maintain your perimeter around young Mister Ducas. Protect

him if necessary, but otherwise do not allow yourselves to be seen. Understand?"

The figures nodded in unison.

"Very good." Chen flared his nostrils involuntarily. "There is one other thing. We have identified someone else with an interest in the Beastheads. A silver-haired mercenary with a penchant for killing your kind."

The shadows twitched upon hearing Chen's last statement, although he could not identify whether the figures were fearful or enraged. Whispers fluttered across the veranda as the newcomers took in the information.

Chen screwed up his face in consternation. "Calm down. We already know the man's name and location. And make no mistake about this, my friends. His interest in the Beastheads will only intensify. He must be dealt with."

The shadows sobered under Chen's soothing tones.

"Devote your energies to tracking our Mister Ducas. He must not escape our sights. Eliminate the warrior Dante. Slay him in the name of the Ghost Knights. He is the wild card. Leaving him alive is too dangerous at this stage."

The figures melted back into the shadows around the edge of the veranda in silence. Once the last of the demons vanished, Chen allowed his customary smile to return. Ho ho! The hunt

has a formidable quarry at last. The one who defeated the King of the Underworld.

Chen's lips curved excitedly as he contemplated the game ahead of him. A Devil Hunter! A throaty chuckle welled up from within, spilling out into the night air.

On the artificial pond, the swans flapped their wings in agitation.

The planet trundled on through its diurnal course, spinning the city into the light of the sun once more. Nothing of note had happened after Chen conferred with the men in black. Ducas had taken the house's winnings and finally stumbled back to his hotel.

Dante spent the rest of the night perched on the stoop under the flickering neon sign, uninterrupted by job inquiries or calls from Enzo. But he knew that the calm betrayed an impending storm. Hours stretched into days, and Dante walked through the week in quiet preparation.

By the weekend, everything would be different.

"Excuse me."

Dante only had a moment to register the sound of a woman's voice before recognizing that Beryl found the offices of Devil May Cry. The reunion was sooner than either of them would have wished.

"A customer. How unusual." Dante didn't move from behind the desk. "I thought you told me not to get involved."

"One can't survive on principles alone, you know."

Beryl plopped herself unceremoniously on a sofa across from Dante, who seemed unconcerned that the woman who had shot at him in the ravine had wandered back into his life. The pair regarded each other for a moment.

Finally, Dante broke the silence. "Did you find what you were after?"

"Yes," Beryl said. "It took some trouble. Look at this." Beryl tossed a newspaper onto the desk.

It was opened to the financial section and featured among its stock quotes and interest rates, a large photograph of a gambler who had attracted attention for an unparalleled winning streak. The pendant hanging from his neck had three canine heads. Dante examined the picture with a frown.

"This is it?"

"Yes; the Beastheads. I don't know how this guy got hold of it, but there we are," Beryl said.

"We?"

Dante scanned the accompanying article. Ducas the Rat had spent the week sinking his winnings into dog and horse races,

spinning that first night at cards into a fortune worth millions. The article was packed with analysts waxing effusively over his keen insight into the vagaries of the bond market and equities.

"How did this clown wind up with the Beastheads?"

"Who knows? That's our next stop." Beryl folded the paper and stuck it back in her pocket. She looked at Dante expectantly.

"Pretty good news, huh?"

Dante glowered at her.

"If you think about it, my job request hasn't actually been fulfilled. You wounded the she-devil, but you let it get away. So in a way, it's your fault that Ducas has the Beastheads." Beryl decided to gloss over the fact that she had distracted Dante by shooting at him and the demon. She adopted her best girlish pout. "I'll give you another chance. Surely you can get close to Ducas and recover the Beastheads."

"What's in it for me?"

"Don't be so vulgar. Besides, didn't I say? The Beastheads is connected to your father."

Dante didn't ask how she knew of his father, or what she was keeping secret about the statue. He knew she was appealing to him out of selfish concerns. Ducas was almost certainly backed by dangerous forces, and allying with Dante would give Beryl a powerful counterweight.

The background of the page is a faded, semi-transparent image of Dante from the video game Devil May Cry 2. He is shown from the waist up, wearing his signature red coat and black pants, holding the massive sword Rebellion in his right hand. The image is framed by a decorative border of small red squares.

Ordinarily, he would coldly eject her onto the street without further comment. Instead, he rose and collected the massive sword Rebellion from its mounting on the wall.

What Beryl wanted with the Beastheads was a question for another time, but for now it was enough that the statue was linked to his father.

"So that's a yes?" Beryl asked.

DEVIL MAY CRY 2
デビルマイクライ 2



"Your previous commission was completed. But I'm interested in your current problem. Consider us partners as long as our interests coincide."

The background of the page is a faded, grayscale image of Dante from the video game Devil May Cry 2. He is shown from the waist up, wearing his signature red coat and black pants. He is holding Rebellion, his signature sword, which is positioned vertically on the right side of the frame. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Beryl beamed at him. "I knew you'd say yes! Come on, let's go!"
She pecked Dante on the cheek and bounded out of the office.

Dante sheathed Rebellion on his back and gritted his teeth.
You've kept me waiting for a long time. Don't disappoint me.

Dante exited Devil May Cry and took another step closer to his destiny.

Phase 2

PART 2

"Mister Ducas! Please, a word about your latest win!"

"Tell us the secret to your success!"

"I hear scouts from the biggest bookies are now showering you with offers. Can you tell us which one you'll accept?"

"Mister Ducas!"

"Sir!"

Ducas blinked at the popping flashbulbs and clicking shutters. He found it increasingly difficult to move in public without immediately being swamped by paparazzi. He pushed through the wall of lenses and microphones and managed to slip into the safety of his hotel room.

Publicly, Ducas said he found fame exhausting, but in reality he made little effort to conceal how much it thrilled him. Sir? Me? This is too funny! He laughed as he fell onto the plush bed in the center of the room.

Just over a week before, he had been going to bed hungry and alone. Yet here he was, hounded by corporate scouts instead of debt collectors. He welcomed each day by waking up in a suite luxurious beyond anything he had ever dreamed of, with sumptuous meals and imported suits available at the press of a

button. The constant stream of girls eager for a taste of the high life ensured he was never lonely.

But every silver lining has a cloud, Ducas thought as he wrestled with a silk tie. He hadn't quite gotten used to accessories, and at any rate the Beastheads around his neck was all he really needed to make a good impression, so he decided not to bother with the tie. He gripped the statue absently. As long as I've got this thing. I'll never have to be the old me again!

Stroking the statue had already become a habit. The first time he had done so, random and incomprehensible images flooded his small mind. He had made the connection that first night Chen sent him to the hotel. Each time he grasped the Beastheads, fragmentary pictures and sounds would wash anxiously over his brain. It was almost enough to make him throw the wretched thing away. But at the last moment he would receive a vision intertwined with his own memories.

It was the trumpet that did it-brass waxed to gleaming and perfectly in tune. Ducas had bought the instrument as a boy, saving money from his first real job to be able to afford it. The vision was accurate down to the patina of scratches and irregularities in the color unique to all instruments.

My last experience with true happiness, he thought. I remember it so well. The golden years; it was all downhill from there.

The vision taught Ducas the hidden power of the Beastheads. Gripping the statue gave him access not only to experience in his past, but experiences yet to come. It took him a few days to learn how to channel the visions for personal gain, but now he could look into the future with a high degree of precision.

His admirers considered the triple-headed pendant to be an eccentricity, but Ducas knew it was something more. It was the source of his power. He had grown to find its hideous faces adorable.

Ducas held the pendant tightly. Come on, show me my tomorrow. He wasn't prepared for what he saw.

Ducas dropped the Beastheads in shock, tumbling to the floor in horror. "What is this?" His heart thumped to a dangerous rhythm as Ducas struggled to regain his breath. What's happening?

The statue had shown him a vision unlike any he had experienced before-an approaching hail of bullets accompanied by a massive sword moving at lightning speed. And behind it all...a smiling, silver-haired man in a red leather coat.

Ducas realized he was looking at his own death.

He wobbled to his feet and placed the Beastheads gingerly in his outstretched palm. There was at least one way to test his conclusion. If he truly were awaiting death in the next twenty-

four hours, the statue wouldn't be able to show him a future beyond tomorrow.

Am I really going to die? His mind wrestled with the options. No! I'm going to be happy forever! But how do I know?

Ducas felt nausea rise up inside of him. He was obsequious and cowardly by nature. He knew he wouldn't be able to grip the Beastheads and verify the vision. What if it told him something he didn't want to know?

He collapsed to the floor once more, gripping his knees, rolling into the fetal position.

And then the cold glare of reality shone on him.

The farthest window shattered in a glittering spray of glass, which peppered the carpet like diamonds. Ducas dove under the bed.

And then he saw the silver-haired man from his vision.

Dante entered Ducas' hotel room and found himself taken aback by the luxurious furnishings.

"Good taste," he said, eyes wide for a moment. "It falls short of my office, of course."

Beryl followed him into the room. "If this is the only way you know to break into a hotel room, it's time to come down from that high horse."

Ducas watched the pair from beneath the bed, shrinking to the farthest corner. His teeth chattered out of abject fear. But Ducas had the wherewithal to consider that the noise might give his position away, so he bit down on his sleeve as hard as he could. Neither of the intruders seemed to notice him.

"Maybe he ran away," Dante suggested. "I heard this place has a private bodyguard service for VIPs."

"Where could he go?" Beryl reasoned. "He's a celebrity now. He'd never get past the reporters downstairs without a scene."

Ducas cowered under the bed like the rat people always said he was, too terrified to even watch the intruders' feet clomp around the room. He knew he'd be caught if he tried to run. He gripped the Beastheads in desperation. Just let it all be over!

The new vision changed everything.

Ducas' fear faded away, replacing the confidence that had characterized him since that first night at the dive bar. He smiled evilly from beneath the bed. Five seconds...

"Mister Ducas! Sir! We heard a crash. Is everything all right?" The door handle rattled as the hotel guard inserted his key.

"What a mess," Beryl snapped. "This should have been an easy catch."

Dante frowned. "Let's get out of here."

The mercenaries knew the hotel guards wouldn't pose a problem, but they were innocent bystanders. A tussle would also create the perfect diversion for someone like Ducas to escape in the shuffle.

"Dante, cover the back door. I'll watch the front-"

"Don't give me orders," Dante muttered. "Beryl, why don't you guard the front door and I'll keep an eye on the back?"

Beryl rolled her eyes and followed Dante back through the broken window.

Once he was sure they were gone, Ducas crawled out from under the bed and raced toward one of the intact windows. If he waited for the guards to storm in, they'd turn into a virtual prison. But if he ran away now, he could start a new life with the power of the Beastheads behind him.

The window faced away from the broken pane the intruders had used, giving him a head start. The penthouse towered over the neighboring buildings. As far as escape routes went, it was strictly for the birds.

Even so, Ducas had no hesitation.

He opened the window and flung himself into empty air. Every last trace of the craven rat under the bed was replaced by a Ducas so confident that he didn't worry even when his body started plummeting toward the ground.

A few moments later, Ducas darted up like a feather. Black wings had sprouted from his back and were beating against the chill night air. The appendages lifted him heavenward in defiance of gravity.

"Ha ha ha!" Ducas laughed with a purity he hadn't felt since the day he'd bought his trumpet. His elegant new wings grabbed at the wind and put distance between himself and the hotel.

He was still laughing several miles later.

"What is that?"

Dante craned his neck to see what Beryl was pointing at.

Dark clouds had drifted in front of the moon, cutting off its silvery light. Even so, both warriors saw the strange figure darting through the velvet sky. Ducas rose and fell in great swoops as the black wings on his back beat up and down.

"How is that possible? Was he a demon the whole time?" she murmured.

Dante sidled his motorcycle beside Beryl, who was paralyzed with awe. "Get on."

"What?"

"If you don't want to go after him, fine. I'll go alone if I have to."

"Chase him? He's in the sky, Dante. He's flying."

"He can't fly forever. We'll follow him until he gets tired. I thought you said you were a Devil Hunter?" Dante lifted Beryl up and gingerly placed her on the seat behind him. He gripped the throttle forcefully and took off into the night, pausing only briefly to pop a flamboyant wheelie.

"I can't breathe back here, Dante. Slow down!"

"We'll lose him! He's already getting tired. Look!"

Ducas' peaks and troughs were rougher now. He appeared to be losing altitude, and Dante was certain he'd be back on the ground soon.

"We need to catch him before he lands. If he gets mixed up in the street crowds, we're going to have a real problem on our hands," said Dante, weaving the motorcycle through a crowded intersection.

Beryl clutched Dante's waist. "Wait! Slow down! I'll be thrown off!"

"Right here, Mister Ducas. Ho ho. Come land, just like that, please."

Ducas honed in on the reassuring glow of a searchlight rocking back and forth on a nearby rooftop. He managed to land with a minimum of tumbling. Flight had been amazing, but the constant beating of his wings was unexpectedly exhausting. Thankfully,

Chen had been on the case, scouring the sky for his newly mobile underling.

"I'm so glad you were able to get away safely, Mister Ducas. I was worried about you." Chen clasped Ducas on the shoulders and gifted him with a patriarchal smile.

"Boss? What are you doing here?" Most in the underworld never met Chen once, let alone enjoyed a repeat encounter. Ducas had expected to be welcomed by hired hands. He didn't know the proper etiquette for greeting Chen, so he opted in favor of prostrating himself on the rooftop.

"Now now, Mister Ducas. Let us dispense with the niceties. Follow me, if you would be so kind." Chen took Ducas' hand and led him to a helicopter.

"Boss, this is..."

"I don't know if you are aware of this, but the friends who broke into your room are on their way here even as we speak. Please allow me to help you escape to safety." Chen smiled graciously.

"It's just that a person of your status doesn't usually help people like me."

"My dear Mister Ducas! Are we not Family? It is as if you are my own child. It's a bond that demands my personal protection."

Ducas wasn't one to recognize melodrama of sarcasm. He was moved by Chen's words and agreed to be escorted to the helicopter. The wind from the craft's whirling blades swept away his tears. "Thank you very much, boss. To be able to work for a man like you, I'm truly..."

Chen's henchmen turned away and tried to suppress their laughter. Chen brought his full bearing on Ducas, widening his ever-present smile.

"From here, this helicopter will fly you to my yacht out at sea. You will board the ship and hide yourself until I contact you again. You must be patient, Mister Ducas. We must make sure it is perfectly safe for you to return to the city. In the meantime, I shall contact your pursuers and see if we can discover a solution to this misunderstanding."

Personal attention from none other than Chen himself! It was almost too much to bear for Ducas. "I'll never forget the kindness you have shown me! My body and my life-both are yours, boss!"

The display was too much for one of the minions, who let loose a heartfelt guffaw. But the noise of the helicopter rotors drowned out the misstep before it reached Ducas' ears.

Chen smiled magnanimously and waved a hand as if brushing away a gnat. "Go now, Mister Ducas. I shall take care of the rest."

Ducas nodded vigorously and then scampered into the helicopter.

When the vehicle was several blocks away, Chen let his smile fade. "When I heard he had taken to the air, I wondered what would happen. But we retrieved young Mister Ducas easily enough. That means others will have easily followed him as well."

Chen snapped his fingers and several figures emerged from the shadows. The mysterious Ghost Knights wore their traditional black jackets and etched masks.

"Dante is doubtless on his way here. I assume you are up to the challenge of eliminating this variable."

The figures nodded and then merged with the shadows once more. Chen led his minions to a second helicopter atop a neighboring helipad. I heard the power of the Beastheads increases as its owner is backed into a corner. I'm relying on you to draw out that power from me, Devil Hunter. Ho ho!

Phase 2

PART 3

Dante slammed on the brakes as a second helicopter flew overheads.

"Hey! Are you trying to make me fall off?" Beryl tightly gripped Dante's red jacket.

"If I was gonna kill you, I'd find a better way than that. Anyway, I didn't really have a choice." Dante pointed toward the darkness that loomed farther down the road. The edges of the shadows were undulating like a jellyfish. Eventually the blackness resolved itself into a horde of masked assassins.

"Ghost Knights," Beryl spat out. "I've heard rumors about them for years. This isn't going to be easy."

Dante dismounted the bike and slipped his hands around Ebony and Ivory.

Beryl pressed her back against his and fondled a machine gun she'd brought along in addition to her beloved anti-tank rifle. They were completely surrounded.

"They're possessed," Dante said, remembering the unsettling eye plate.

"I'm not surprised," Beryl said. "They work for Chen. But they specialize in demon extermination. I never thought they'd be coming after me."

"Who's Chen?" asked Dante.

Beryl spun around in exasperation, temporarily pushing the Ghost Knights from her mind. "Unbelievable! I've had it with you! Why don't you actually learn a thing or two about your city? Even kids know who Chen the Cannibal is."

The circle of Ghost Knights closed in step by step. Each figure carried a pair of small blades instead of guns. But Dante and Beryl were absorbed in their conversation.

"Oh, Chen the Cannibal. Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

Beryl threw her hands up in despair.

Dante decided that he ought to pay attention to their situation. "These goons want a closer-range battle."

"Maybe they think they don't need guns against opponents like us? They must be awfully confident to take on two Devil Hunters."

Dante bristled. "One Devil Hunter."

"Here they come!"

Ebony and Ivory roared into life as Dante sprang into a combat position. He eschewed his typical rapid fire in favor of calculated shots at his opponents' foreheads. The possessed souls fell to

the ground with inhuman cries, the eyes' controlling power now obliterated.

Beryl unleashed her fury with abandon, sinking bullets into the black figures' bellies and destroying limbs. But even the most hideously wounded Ghost Knights continued to advance. Dante and Beryl risked sinking under the sheer weight of numbers.

The size of their opposition meant little to Dante. "Bring it on!" he shouted at nobody in particular, his twin pistols spitting out death even faster than Beryl's machine gun ever could. The Ghost Knights were oblivious to his assault and pressed on with their attack.

Dante easily dodged the black figures' glinting daggers. "Come on, guys. I'm getting bored here. If this keeps up, we'll have to pause for a nap."

The warriors realized that Dante was in no danger of feeling the prick of their blades, so they turned their attention to Beryl. She was holding her own, but she was still the easier target nonetheless. The figures stretched their arms in impossible directions, bending their joints at nightmarish angles and snaking their forearms across the battlefield.

"Not fast enough!" Beryl boasted, ducking an attack. She rolled across the asphalt and swung her machine gun into position. She was determined to live up to her Devil Hunter reputation,

especially in front of Dante. The Ghost Knights might have phantasmic powers now, but they were human once. Beryl had taken out true demons in her time and wasn't about to let a few possessed bastards get the better of her.

She butted her gun into the nearest attacker's stomach and then swung a knee into his chin as he doubled over. Beryl brought her weapon to bear as the warrior stumbled backward. She fired a quick burst into his abdomen.

She might as well not have bothered.

"No way!"

The attacker calmly rose to his feet and began advancing once more. Beryl broke out in a sweat. She wasn't scared, necessarily-at least, not that she would admit to Dante-but whereas he was dispatching his opponents into the afterlife, none of her attacks resulted in mortalities. "Chen sure knows what he's doing," she hissed through gritted teeth.

She couldn't know that Dante had discovered the creatures' weak point during the melee in the ravine. He coolly blasted each attacker in the face without further thought. But Beryl believed the Ghost Knights to be victims of temporary magic or possession. She wasn't afraid to use her gun when necessary, but she was holding back until given opponent left her with no choice. Even then, she tried to avoid vital areas.

"Just fall down!" she screamed.

The steady influx of Ghost Knights was beginning to get on Beryl's nerves. Aside from those who actually had limbs blasted off, none of her attackers displayed any hint of a wound after getting back up off the ground. The street was free from blood.

She fought to suppress a wave of panic. "Don't come any closer!"

Watching her opponents rise back up after being shot triggered a primitive fear response, which in turn weighed on her nerves. Beryl knew she was succumbing to fatigue. To make matters worse, she had lost track of Dante.

Click!

The sound sent a shiver down her spine.

Beryl didn't need to check to know that it was the sound of her machine gun locking up. There was no time to figure out whether it had overheated or simply jammed while loading bullets. I need my rifle.

The realization dawned too late. Beryl saw several killing blades arcing toward her, and suddenly she knew she was too fatigued to even raise her arms in defense. Her indecision had given the Ghost Knights the perfect window.

"No!" Her reflexive scream subsided at the sound of a familiar voice.

"Don't get excited. Let's play it cool." Dante whirled his massive pistols into position and calmly dispatched each of the blades, and then took out the figures who had thrown them.

"Dante?"

"That was the last of them. I admit it took longer than I had anticipated."

Beryl exhaled slowly. Finally, she composed herself and rose to her feet. The street was littered with inert bodies of Ghost Knights, each one shot mercilessly through the forehead. The site instinctively disgusted her.

Beryl turned on Dante. He had saved her life even though she had endangered his in the ravine near the temple. A torrent of words spilled from her mouth before she even realized she was talking. "You went too far, Dante!"

"I'm not much of a humanitarian." He shrugged. "If you come at me, I'm going to win. End of story."

"You didn't have to kill them all like that! Look at them!" Beryl swallowed her words before accusing Dante of massacre. This is almost like the handiwork of a devil. And then she remembered his origin.

Mercenaries gossiped to a degree that put housewives to shame, and Dante was a favorite subject for after-hours speculation. Some said his silver hair came from none other than the ancient hero Sparda, while others limited their concerns to whether or not he truly pioneered Devil Hunting or whether he actually ever did any work, what with his trademark red leather coat always looking so spiffy. Dante was even rumored to have defeated the King of the Underworld himself, although of course nobody really believed that.

Beryl had never heard anyone accuse Dante of being the sort of ruthless killer likely to be involved in an outright massacre, but the tableau of bodies on the street spoke for itself. She found herself recalling the rumors that demon blood pumped through Dante's veins.

She willed herself to snap out of it. The Beastheads had to come first. "If we hurry, we might be able to catch the helicopter when it lands."

Dante shook his head grimly. "No. Ducas can wait. I want to meet this Chen of yours. Someone needs to teach him a lesson about what happens when you mess with me."

Ducas' helicopter had already alighted on a gargantuan yacht by the time the last of the Ghost Knights fell.

He had annoyed everyone else in the chopper by repeatedly thanking Chen for his miraculous escape, even though Chen had stayed behind in the city. But to Ducas, the thanks had become a mantra. Chen was his benefactor. It was through Chen that he had his lucky talisman.

Ducas waved dumbly at the helicopter as it flew back toward the shore. He thought about his future. Everyone will know my name now, he mused. How many great men have had to flee overseas? Yeah! A few years in the South Seas, maybe. Lie on the beach and get a tan. The ladies would be all over me. Ducas the Legendary!

Ducas wandered across the ship's wide deck and descended into its central cabin. A number of immaculate bedrooms ringed the luxurious main living space. The kitchen was more suited to a house than a boat. Ducas grabbed a carrot from the refrigerator and continued his tour. It didn't take much longer to realize that something was amiss.

"Hello?"

The yacht was empty. Everywhere he went, Ducas' voice was the only noise. He hadn't seen a single crewmember on the deck, and the interior was too different. The engine room churned with machinery but no one was there to oversee it. The captain was conspicuously absent from the empty bridge.

Ducas was alone.

I don't understand.

Ducas returned to the bridge, but he had no idea how to sail a yacht and wasn't stupid enough to try flicking random switches. Heart racing, he made his way to the radio room. His calls were met with static.

Something's wrong. I need to tell the boss about that!

Ducas rushed back up to the deck. The helicopter was gone, but he had his own means of flight now. However, at that moment he was unable to will his black wings to appear. How had they sprouted before?

He dashed from rail to rail and realized that he had no idea where the boat was or in which direction he should fly anyway. There was no sign of land. His path to freedom turned out to be a prison.

"Help me! Somebody please help me!" Ducas collapsed onto the deck and curled into the fetal position, clutching the Beastheads.

Its sharp dog ears cut into the palm of his hand, smearing blood against the statue.

Ducas gripped the pendant tightly and felt the dizzying onset of another mystical vision. Images from the future rushed into his

brain. A sky choked off by black clouds. Silver flashes of pouring rain. Ducas on the ground, cut down by Dante.

"No!"

Ducas rolled around on the deck in despair, squeezing the Beastheads with hopes of changing the vision. But the images replayed identically each time. Dante slicing Ducas from his shoulder to his pelvis. Ducas crashing lifelessly to the ground amid the geysers of blood.

Ducas sobbed openly. There was no one to hear him anyway.

...to us?

A familiar voice wove its way into Ducas' ears.

...sacrifice thine all to us?

The voice was unmistakably inhuman. Ducas had heard it before, back at his apartment. The malevolent sound provoked a primal response of fear and despair. And it drove Ducas over the edge.

Normal judgment behind him, Ducas shoved the Beastheads into his mouth and tried to grind it apart with his teeth.

"We've lost contact with the yacht, sir. Something to do with the weather."

Chen nodded slowly at the report. "I was expecting something like this. Young Mister Ducas is in possession of an item said to

have been crafted by the King of the Underworld himself. Supernatural happenings are to be expected in these circumstances. I suspect our friend is enduring a moment of utter despair. There's a little better for enabling the truth to flow freely."

Chen eased himself off a voluminous leather sofa and crossed to a large window. Ducas' yacht appeared to be floating just outside, swallowed up and spat back out by black clouds.

"The techniques of the demon realm are truly remarkable," Chen said, more to himself than anyone else. "Faraway oceans and distant events can be brought to us as if we could reach out and pluck Mister Ducas from my ship. And these are just the powers of the lesser demons. Imagine what we might achieve with the abilities of a higher devil, or the Beastheads itself."

"Yes, sir," the minion said blankly.

Chen ignored the response, enraptured by the images beyond the glass. His face shone with the pure delight of a child. "How much longer before humans lose their taste for the pretty advantages gained by dominating each other? Absorption into the demon realm offers limitless power."

The yacht beyond the window rose and fell wildly as rain pummeled the seas.

Black clouds coalesced around it, spitting lightning.

Those who possess the Beastheads have access to the past and the future.

Lightning flashed again, casting a glow against Chen's features. His peaceful expression bore hints of emptiness, greed, and brutality. His twin pursuit of esoteric knowledge and criminal violence had given Chen a sense of transcendence.

Legend has it that the three heads symbolize the past, present, and future. We have seen the power symbolize by the past and future. But what of the present?

Chen gazed hypnotically at the black clouds on the other side of the window. He had waited his whole life for this. He had the patience to wait a little longer.

"Can you believe this wind? It's messing up my hair," moaned Dante.

"A mercenary obsessed by his own appearance? This weather obviously means the end of the world."

Dante and Beryl were standing on the edge of a sea cliff. They had abandoned the motorcycle when the road ended. Now they made their way through tall grass, attempting to get to the ocean.

The cliff plunged into the sea at an oblique angle, giving the impression that by merely peering over the edge, one would be sucked toward the violent waves down below.

The pair had spied the black storm clouds, and both sensed a preternatural influence. Dante suspected a localized incursion of the demon realm, which meant that Ducas and the Beastheads were probably at its heart.

"Can you feel it?" Beryl sensed an almost tangible malice in the air. She absently stroked the scar on her collarbone. "Is this normal in the demon realm?"

"How should I know?" Dante replied. "Ask a demon."

Both knew something was wrong.

The air grew thicker, swelling with tension. It smelled of sulfur and ozone. The two Devil Hunters instinctively gripped their weapons and stared tersely out at the gathering clouds.

"Here it comes," Dante said grimly.

Thunder pealed, and at last it appeared.

Phase 2

PART 4

The world shook.

The immutable laws of physics wrestled with forces intent on ignoring them. It was the birthing pains of a creature from a dimension anathema to our own.

"This is pretty quiet for the end of the world." A deflated Dante said, coddling Ebony and Ivory. "I expected something more, somehow. It's taken the wind out of my sails."

His traditional bluster had been replaced by an understated sobriety. The seaside was more than quiet-it was utterly silent. The waves crashed soundlessly against the cliff. The wind ripping through the tall grass behind Dante and Beryl accompanied by its traditional rustling. It was as if nature itself feared provoking the Beastheads.



Beryl ignored Dante. She was too busy staring at the statue, which had somehow grown to enormous proportions and loomed amid the black clouds. A chill ran down her spine. Gravity pulled at her, and the air itself felt heavy and oppressive.

Dante didn't seem to notice. "I'm not saying this is bad, as far as ends of the world go. A little too gloomy, maybe. I guess we should see what this guy's made of." He called Ebony and Ivory into action, drumming out a furious tattoo. The three heads seemed unpreturbed by the fusillade.

"It's no good, Dante. It's not working."

"No-look."

One of the heads writhed almost imperceptibly in the distance.

"It's in pain, all right. It might look impressive at the scale, but lead always works in the end," Dante said. "Well, nine times out of ten."

Beryl stared at him dumbly.

"What's the matter? Did you wet your pants or something?"

But Beryl didn't respond. Instead, she clutched at her scar. It quivered in a steady rhythm, as if a new heart had formed beneath it. And that's when she realized that the beating matched the movements of the imposing Beastheads blotting out the sky.

"I thought you were a Devil Hunter," Dante taunted.

"Shut up! You don't understand!"

Beryl trembled. Negative energy washed over her, stamping out all the confidence she had accrued through years of grappling with monsters. She found herself crushed by shame and embarrassment.

It is useless.

It is meaningless.

We are the Almighty and have bound thy fate.

Each pulse across her scar carried an ethereal voice on its crest-the Beastheads bore down on Beryl. Resignation engulfed her. Malignant tendrils reached out invisibly, digging deep into her soul.

Despair is a human emotion.

This weakness is thy final refuge from our power.

Beryl lifted her head to look at Dante. Her wound burned and vibrated, overcoming her warrior instincts. "I can't fight it. I can't even stand up! Don't you understand?"

"I don't want to understand," he snapped. "Fighting these things is the reason I'm here."

"The only thing the Beastheads creates is despair!"

"Devils don't know anything about despair." It was a whisper, but the words sunk into Beryl's subconscious. "If you don't want to die, then fight. That thing on your back isn't just for decoration."

Dante turned his back to Beryl and dashed to the edge of the cliff. Just as the earth fell away to the sea, he pushed off and rocketed into the air. Red and silver shot toward the giant demon filling the sky.

"You might be big, but we'll find out if you're strong!" He squeezed off another torrent of bullets in rapid sequence. A gust of wind filled out Dante's red jacket and pushed him back onto the cliff top.

The battle was pointless as far as Beryl could see. The world was spinning out toward its end. There was no stopping the demon dog that now blotted out the sky. Her crushing despair obliterated any attempt at defiance. Beryl knew a weaker person would have already succumbed to death by now. It was only a matter of time until she did the same.

But Dante's words resounded deep inside her.

Where have I seen this scene before?

Watching Dante's valiant struggle resonated with memories long since forgotten...A black time shrouded in darkness and populated by those waiting for death. The supreme power of the King of the Underworld dominated a planet on the verge of transforming into a second demon realm. And then a solitary warrior appeared. The greatest swordsman of the Underworld-a

recklessly brave hero who revolted against his king and staved off the demon forces. Dark Knight Sparda.

Beryl had grown up with the legend. And now a story two thousand years old was playing itself out in front of her. A hero wielding a massive sword exactly like the one in the picture books she'd read as a child.

Dante?

Dante refused to back down in the face of the colossal Beastheads, although his attacks had little impact. His silver hair matched the storybook pictures of Sparda himself.

A coincidence? Or a homage?

Either way, the realization gave Beryl a glimmer of hope. A spark energized her. Beryl could feel her spirit and courage welling up in defiance. The malevolent presence in her consciousness ebbed.

Beryl grabbed the anti-tank rifle from her back. Its reassuring weight boosted her confidence further. "Dante! You won't get anywhere with those peashooters!"

Dante swung low to the ground, giving Beryl a clear shot at their adversary. She squeezed off five rounds at the creature.

The missiles punched deep into the Beastheads' flesh. The demon unleashed a roar that drowned out the returning thunder.

The whipping wind regained its mournful whistle as the Beastheads' localized hold on nature relaxed.

Beryl had hit each of the creature's three heads. The massive entity toppled from the sky as it writhed in agony.

"Okay! Now let's see if we can't cut this thing down in size."

Dante sprung into action. He ran toward the cliff edge once more and leapt into the air, pulling Rebellion from its scabbard on his back. The massive blade sliced through the nape of the left head. Bilious liquid gushed from the wound, painting the sky a vulgar color. Dante wrestled with the sword to saw out as much flesh and bone as possible.

The mammoth demon bellowed so horrifically that Beryl's ears went numb. Its left head dangled from a thin stretch of skin. Dante was fairly certain it wasn't going to heal. He fell toward the ocean with a smile.

Dante calmly sheathed Rebellion as he approached the waves and twisted around to land feet first. He sank into the saltwater like a torpedo.

"Dante!"

Beryl peeked over the edge of the cliff in horror, only to see Dante bobbing on the surface like a red and silver buoy. He grinned like a schoolboy. "I wasn't in the mood for a bath, but

what the hell. I bet I look dashing with this water dripping everywhere. Tell me the truth. Do you think I'm hot?"

"Who wouldn't?"

"So you've got some life left you after all. That's great. Let's go!"

Dante shot out of the water and propelled himself up the side of the cliff with a series of sharp kicks. He landed on the grassy cliff top with both guns drawn. "Let's finish this, Beryl."

"Already with you." Beryl leveled her anti-tank rifle at one of the demon's heads, and Dante waved Ebony and Ivory. The mercenaries pulled their triggers simultaneously.

Beryl was once more almost deafened by the Beastheads' roar.

Dante had shot out another head's eyes. Its jaw was completely missing courtesy of Beryl. The Beatheads' lolled its two useless heads pathetically as the demons crashed into the ocean.

Sprays of foul liquid arced into the air and stained the violent sea.

Once more, Beryl noticed the local weather returning closer to normal. A warmer breeze. The scent of tall grass. The despair that had threatened to overtake her had vanished. It must have been the Beastheads' power!

Two of the behemoth's three heads were now butchered. Beryl couldn't detect the slightest hint of the malevolent presence that

had recently dominated her mind. The sea rolled where the creature thrashed about in pain and humiliation.

"That's right, bitch. You weren't a bad sparring partner, but the game's over now."

Dante unleashed a torrent of bullets from his two pistols, launching a deadly swarm toward the Beastheads. The gargantuan creature was so close that Dante could have hit it with his eyes closed. "So long. Go back to your world with your tail between your legs."

But the end never came.

Instead, a dreadful metallic sound rang out, louder even than the Beastheads' own roar.

"What happened?" Beryl yelled, both her hands clamped over her ears.

Dante would have explained, but his brain was too busy trying to process what he was seeing to bother with stringing words together.

The monster's remaining mouth had opened wide and actually spat out a human onto a cliff. The figure dusted itself off and confidently strolled toward the two mercenaries. Dante couldn't help but notice the newcomer wore an expensive suit. The familiar man wore the same black aura as the Beastheads.

It was Ducas.

But a very different Ducas. The sniveling cretin from earlier was gone, and in his place stood a self-assured man brimming with power. It was almost as if he had swapped bodies with a superior being.

"Nice to meet you," Ducas said disarmingly. "Dante the Devil Hunter."

"Three heads and good manners. I have to say I'm impressed with the way you deflected my bullets using just telepathy." The metallic report had signaled the volley blinking out of existence as Ducas mentally eradicated the bullets. "You're not an ordinary rat," Dante added. "Who are you really?"

"If I use the name Ducas, you probably won't believe me. Think about it, son of Sparda."

The two men traded glares. Their locked gazes grew increasingly tense as they each assessed the other. Dante knew that Ducas wielded considerable power; a weaker man would have pressed the attack immediately. The standoff meant that Ducas was confident he could easily take the Devil Hunter.

In the end, it was Beryl who ended the deadlock. "Out of the way, Dante!" Her bullets cut down Ducas a moment later. Beryl frowned. "You let your guard down and forgot about me."

"I gave you all due consideration," Ducas replied.

The next voice belonged to neither of them. Beryl spun round in horror to see Ducas standing behind her. He showed no trace of having been gunned down a moment earlier.

"You're a weakling and a nuisance," Ducas snarled. He pushed the empty air in front of him and Beryl felt a violent impact in the pit of her stomach. The invisible force sent her flying several meters across the cliff top.

Ducas was her physical inferior, but this mental power was beyond Beryl's understanding. Nevertheless, she quickly realized that Ducas the Rat was somewhere inside that body. He somehow had the raw power for a fight, but not the experience or skill.

"Your back is open," she pointed out.

By the time Ducas realized what was happening, Dante had already plowed Rebellion from chest to hip. The blade attacked with blistering speed.

Ducas doubled over. "Coward. Cutting me from behind!"

"It's actually an honor to be called a coward by a demon," Dante pointed out.

Dante had suspected that Ducas the Rat was no longer human, but it took nearly cleaving him in two to prove it. His pathetic body was no longer mortal. Rebellion's incision revealed a man that had become little more than a puppet. Ducas' insides were

overrun with supernatural influence. It pulsed out an invisible shockwave.

"That possession trick wouldn't have worked on me even as a child." Dante sneered. He flicked Rebellion once more and casually lopped off Ducas' head. The nicely suited body toppled over the edge of the cliff and clashed into the surf below.

"Dante, you idiot!"

Dante turned around reflexively, wondering what Beryl had gotten herself into now.

As it turned out, Beryl was wriggling between the Beastheads' last remaining pair of jaws. Ducas' final supernatural push had sent her flying right over the edge of the cliff and into the sea, where the wounded beast had snatched her by the shoulders.

Dante unsheathed Rebellion, eager to give the blade another workout. "You don't want to eat her," he called out to the monster. "She'll give you diarrhea. I'd spit her out if I were you."

The creature narrowed its eyes cryptically.

Dante shrugged. "I don't get intimidated by puppies." He wandered toward the Beastheads, dragging Rebellion limply on the ground behind him. He could press it into action in the space of a moment, or drop the sword and whip out his guns.

The doglike head simply stared over Beryl's head at Dante.

"You think I care what happens to her? Whatever. Eat her. Get indigestion. See if I care."

Dante jabbed Rebellion into the soil and pulled out Ebony and Ivory. He aimed the weapons directly at the Beastheads' brain-a move that placed Beryl directly in his sight.

Beryl seethed at him.

"Come on, Beryl. Don't resent me. I'll be sure to put some flowers by your grave."

"You pathetic assho-"

The roar of the gunfire drowned out of the rest of Beryl's sentence. The Beastheads groaned in anger and pain, dropping Beryl from its jaws.

But she never hit the ground.

Dante rose off the cliff top to meet her.

They'd been suspended by invisible forces. They rose into the air in disbelief.

"Hey, what is this crap?" Dante fumed. "I'm talking to you, dogbrea-!"

His words were cut off as if yanked out of time and space. Strange energy ripped through Dante. He felt his body stretching, falling. Falling forever into a black voice. And that's when he realized what was happening.

The background of the page is a faded, semi-transparent image of the Devil May Cry 2 cover art. It shows Dante, a man with spiky blonde hair, wearing a red coat and black pants, holding a large sword. The title "DEVIL MAY CRY 2" is written in large, stylized red and white letters across the middle of the image.

He and Beryl were dropping into the mouth of the Beastheads.
Falling, but to a world that has taken another path.

An ominous voice briefly echoed in his head. And then Dante
could see and hear no more. Eventually, he lost consciousness.

Phase 3

PART 1

She was dreaming.

It felt hollow and strange, as dreams often do. Beryl watched her younger self with a mixture of emotions. She knew she was dreaming of course. One doesn't generally come across younger versions of oneself in the waking hours. The scene playing itself out before her was one Beryl had relived countless times, despite how hard she tried to forget. It was the moment when the path of her life was decided.

"Daddy! Daddy! Where are you?"

The young Beryl's voice sounded strained as she yelled, scampering through an anxious crowd. She wore ragged jeans and her red hair was cut short like a boy's. She fought her way through the crush of people, screaming out for her father. Her eyes welled with tears.

The adult Beryl knew what happened next.

The ground heaved, breaking apart the waves of people. Men and women fled in terror, but the cries overwhelmed young Beryl. She stood, stupefied, as a strange shadow fell across her path. A terrifying monster with giant compound eyes and mouth-like wings stepped into view, clicking and buzzing with its demonic tongue.

The creature grabbed Beryl and flew into the air. The girl wailed and pummeled its bristling chest, punching a hole through her right side. Warm blood stained her shirt.

I was so scared. Beryl could remember every vivid detail.

The demon was shot down before it got too far. Someone in the crowd caught Beryl just before she smashed into the ground.

And then she saw it.

The beast's glittering compound eyes crumbled away as it died, revealing the face of her beloved father inside. He tightly clutched a small statue.

It was a statue Beryl would never forget-an elaborate dog with three heads.

Oh, Daddy. Even the Beastheads couldn't give you the power to bring Mommy back to life.

In the dream, Beryl sobbed wretchedly.

The adult Beryl stood beside her, her cheeks stained with hot tears.

Beryl opened her eyes. Her face was still moist with tears. The scar running across the right side of her chest ached hotly. It was the wound caused when her father stabbed her with the Beastheads.

I can only detect the presence of the Beastheads because of that wound.

Beryl rubbed the inflamed scar and looked around. She and Dante seemed to be in a cavern of some kind. Her companion had draped his long red jacket over her.

"You looked like you were having a nightmare," Dante explained.

Beryl turned away with embarrassment. Did he see me crying? She wiped her tears from her face with the back of her hand.

"It was nothing," she offered weakly.

"I see. That's okay, then."

Beryl surveyed the small cave again. Dante had gently reclined her against the back wall, while he crouched on a rock near the mouth. He kept a sharp watch on the world outside with his unsheathed sword in his hand. The cave was warm and smelled of sulfur.

Beryl had memorized the local landmarks as she and Dante tracked Ducas earlier. A mercenary could never be too careful in the event of a retreat or trap. But she hadn't noticed a hot springs or volcano-nothing that could account for the heat and stench. She doubted the Beastheads could have carried them very far with its critical wounds.

"Sleep some more, while you can." Dante's words broke Beryl's train of thought. He was curt, but she appreciated the thoughtfulness.

"Thanks. But I'm okay."

"It would have been less trouble if you had slept longer."

Beryl didn't know how to process Dante's odd response. She rose to walk out of the cave and was struck by an uncanny nausea. She felt simultaneously dizzy and lethargic, as if she only had half the required energy for movement. The hot ache in her old scar had spread to her whole body. Beryl approached Dante, holding on to the cave walls to support herself.

"What's happening? I can barely pull myself together."

"I figured something like this would happen," Dante said flatly.

"You'll get used to it. It's not going away anytime soon." Dante pointed outside the cavern.

She couldn't believe her eyes.

The cave seemed to be high above the ground, giving them a good perspective of the surrounding land. It wasn't a view Beryl had been expecting.

Bizarre trees clumped together to form a forest thick with new colors. Dark water trickled in a nearby stream. The heavy sky

hung low, almost like a physical force pressing down on the strange creatures strutting across the garish landscape.

"It's full of demons!" Beryl exclaimed in a hushed voice.

"It sure looks that way," Dante said.

"What happened? Where is this place?"

"I honestly don't know. But it doesn't look like the Underworld."

"What do you mean, you don't know? Pretty pathetic for the son of a devil."

"Think of me as setting an example for all the other demons raised in the stink of fine women and good booze." Dante sheathed Rebellion and came down from his perch.

"I'm going down to have a look. Catch up when you're feeling better," he said.

She blinked. "You'd leave me alone in this place? What kind of a man are you?"

"Well, it looked a little dangerous to go out there with dead weight holding me back." Dante flashed a smile and eased into his red coat.

A moment later he was whizzing down the steep cliff face that held the cave high above the ground.

This place is bizarre. There's so much malice in the air that I'm practically breathing it in, he thought. Dante crashed through a series of brittle branches and landed heavily on the ground with a thud. The earth beneath his feet felt ordinary enough. The heat and stench were noticeable, but not dangerous. Still, Dante's senses had shifted into overdrive. Something was wrong.

Something unnatural.

Dante peered through the languid air to take in his surroundings. The desolate landscape was somehow not quite right, as if the trees didn't come out of the ground at the correct angle. He had landed in the forest that he'd spied from the cave. The overgrown plants made Dante uncomfortable. He was no botanist, but the vegetation seemed abnormal.

The hazy twilight air made it difficult to see far, and Dante had already lost sight of the cave. The forest carried with it a familiar and oppressive atmosphere. He had sensed something similar not too long before—a palpable something that gnawed at the soul. Gilver felt like this; the demon world.

Yet he doubted he and Beryl were in the Underworld. There was no sense of magic underpinning the geography. In fact, magic was rather conspicuous in its absence. Dante suspected he was in a halfway place, a realm neither human nor demon.

"I don't know how long you've been there, but I don't like being stalked. Come on out." Dante scanned the thicket surrounding him. He spoke in a casual tone, but every muscle was ready for action. "If you don't show me your face, I'll get it myself on the edge of my sword."

Time passed. Dante felt the tension rise. His pursuer hadn't made a move after Dante had called out. Intuition told him that he was in danger; whatever was stalking him wasn't afraid.

Finally, a black shadow abruptly appeared in front of Dante. The figure wore the long black jacket of the Ghost Knights, but he left his face exposed. He studied Dante, who eventually grew impatient with the standoff and decided to break the silence.

"So who are you, then?"

"My name is Shadow. It is an honor to make your acquaintance, second son of Sparda." The newcomer spoke in a dignified tone and, although ominous in appearance, comported himself with politeness. But Dante was focused on other things.

"Second son?" Dante stepped backward, assuming a stance that would allow him to unsheathe Rebellion and strike Shadow down in a single stroke.

"Calm down. I mean you no harm." Shadow raised his hands in mock surrender. "Surely you know your brother? He was our great leader, Nelo Angelo."

"Nelo Angelo...?" Dante knew the name well but gave no outward sign of understanding.

Nelo Angelo had been a powerful Dark Knight who had successfully warded off Dante several times during the final assault on the King of the Underworld. His unnatural armor and giant sword had made him a formidable opponent, but Dante had eventually defeated him after a bloody tussle.

"After the loss of our great leader, I personally led our remaining forces against the King of the Underworld."

"What?" Whatever Dante had been expecting to hear, it wasn't it. He whipped out Rebellion and pointed its blade at Shadow. Eyes narrow and jaw set grimly, Dante was ready to run the newcomer through on the spot. "What did you say?"

"We fought against the King of the Underworld."

"You're yanking the wrong chain, pal." Dante pressed his sword against Shadow's throat, exerting just enough pressure to avoid breaking the skin.

Shadow was taken aback. "What? Master Dante, did you side with the King of the Underworld against your own brother?"

"I don't know what you're trying to pull here, but I killed the King of the Underworld and your demon boss."

"What did you say, sir?" Shadow gulped. "The true Master Dante was carried off by the King of the Underworld during childhood and forever separated from his brother, the great Nelo Angelo. No one knew whether you were alive or dead."

Dante lowered his sword. "Well, that explains something," he said. "I was swallowed by the Beastheads and somehow sent to this middle world. "But you're mostly wrong. I've spent my life hiding from the King of the Underworld. He never knew where I was."

Shadow remained silent. Dante didn't think the stranger was lying; the story was too outrageous, and in any case Shadow didn't seem the type capable of pretense. That threw up a single possibility, one that he left Dante perplexed and even frightened.

This is a different world in a parallel universe.

One in which history diverged dramatically from Dante's universe, recasting Nelo Angelo as a hero. Dante mused

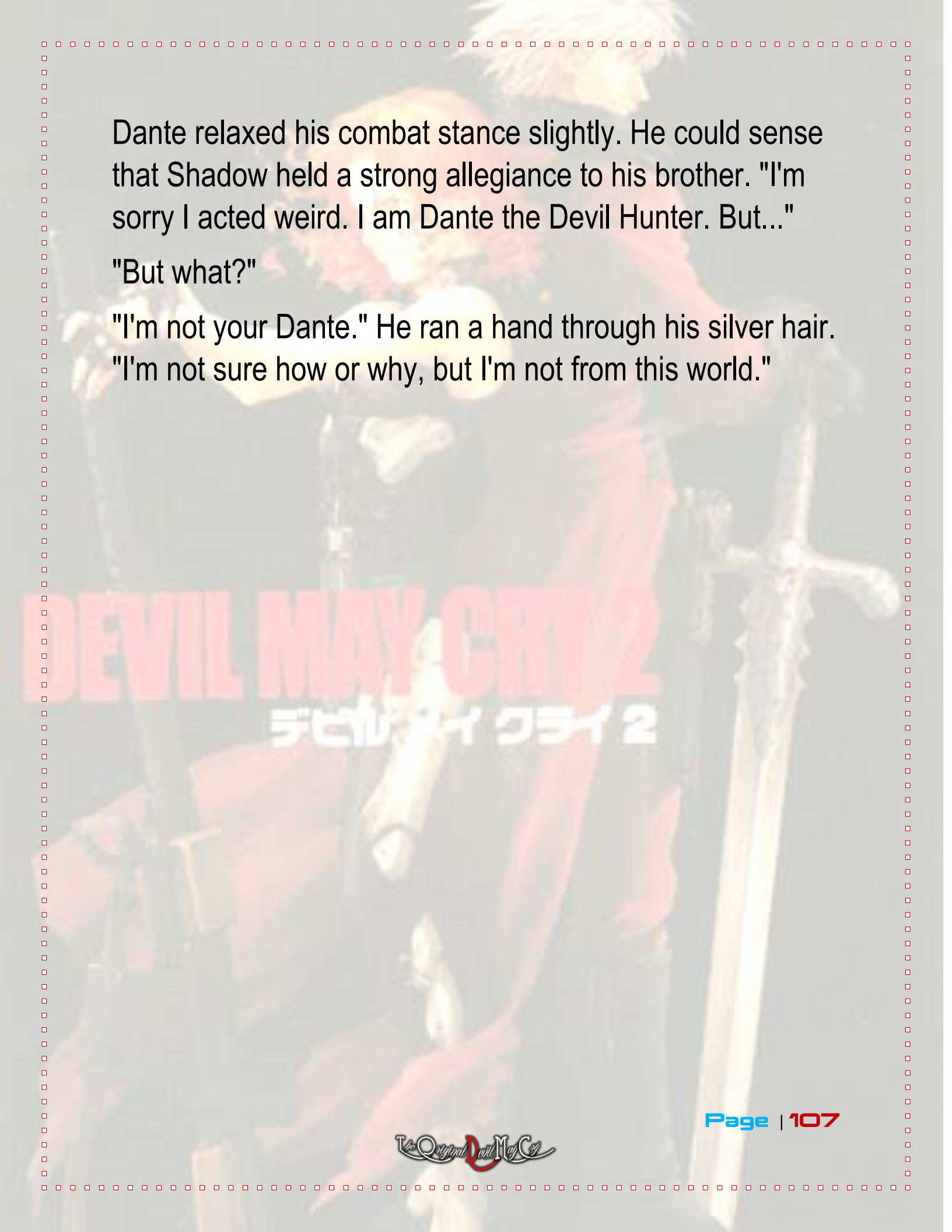
over the possibility of an evil twin running around in this alternate world even now.

Ordinarily, he would have laughed off talk of parallel universes. A demonic Underworld, sure. But a parallel universe? Pull the other one.

Yet, since arriving in the cave after being swallowed by the Beastheads, the uncanny environment had gnawed at him. It felt similar to the Underworld, yet clearly wasn't the demon realm-not as he knew it, anyway. The trees and rocks were slightly off, the creatures indescribably different. The air itself was almost imperceptibly askew. It made sense that these changes carried over into history itself. In this world, he had allied with Demon King Mundus instead of killing him. It's unbelievable.

Nevertheless, Dante was a realist.

Shadow sensed Dante's hesitation. "Is something the matter, Master Dante?" Even though the tip of Rebellion still rested against his throat, Shadow didn't seem to consider Dante as an enemy.

A faded background image of Dante from Devil May Cry 2. He is wearing his signature red coat and black pants, holding his silver sword. The text "DEVIL MAY CRY 2" and its Japanese equivalent "デビルマイクライ 2" are visible in the background.

Dante relaxed his combat stance slightly. He could sense that Shadow held a strong allegiance to his brother. "I'm sorry I acted weird. I am Dante the Devil Hunter. But..."

"But what?"

"I'm not your Dante." He ran a hand through his silver hair.

"I'm not sure how or why, but I'm not from this world."

Phase 3

PART 2

"This is just what I'd expect from the son of the Dark Knight," Beryl scoffed. "Of course you'd have clout with demons like this."

"Don't mock me. I don't even understand what's going on here."

Shadow had taken Dante to a small collection of huts halfway up the mountain where he and Beryl had first appeared. Beryl had been discovered by some of his subordinates and taken there before Dante arrived. Shadow described his band as traitors to the King of the Underworld, which neither Devil Hunter had a handle on yet. Each of Shadow's warriors looked human, but they gave off a strange aura that threw Dante and Beryl.

Shadow had accepted Dante as an honored guest and blood relation to Nelo Angelo, the killer of the demon king in another world. The possibility that Dante had lied about his origins didn't seem to have occurred to them. What sort of demons are these? Dante mused.

They were currently resting in what seemed to be a meeting hall. Shadow led just one faction of warriors; upon arriving at

the outpost, Dante had discovered that the demons were amassing a secret army from various tribes to coordinate an attack against the King of the Underworld.

"A parallel universe? You're asking me to accept a fairy tale," Beryl grumbled.

"Yep." Dante wasn't actually sure about that, but he didn't have anything else as far as theories went. That was good enough for him, but Beryl found it difficult to accept things on faith alone.

"Well, how long do you plan on sitting here? If this really is another world, we've got to figure out a way to get back."

Beryl clutched her rifle anxiously. She had reflexively adopted a combat posture, unable to relax in the subtle horror of the parallel world.

"Just one job," Dante said. "We've got time for one job before we go home. If the King of the Underworld is somehow alive here, we've got to take him down."

"I thought you killed the King of the Underworld."

"I'm just saying."

Suddenly, Dante lashed out with Rebellion, skewering the air inches above Beryl's head. He pulled the sword back before she could speak. A green beetle wriggled on its tip, oozing

black liquid from its cracked carapace. The unholy insect was as large as a fist.

"This is a spy," Dante said grimly. "The King of the Underworld knows we've allied with Shadow and the other rebels."

"What is that thing?"

"Just a bug. But look at the way it glitters when I turn it. It's been bathed in Mundus' power, and now it serves as his eyes and ears." Dante flicked the dead beetle to the ground and stood up.

The motion made Beryl recall illustrations of Sparda once more. Dante had the legendary warrior's power and confidence, but this was offset with an unbecoming awkwardness. She admired his tenacity and his ability to remain cool even when transported to this alien place. Although she wasn't attracted to him, Dante had an undeniable charisma. Nobody knew why Sparda had taken up arms against the King of the Underworld. Maybe the answer lay hidden within Dante.

"Don't go trying to dig up dirt about my past while we're here." Dante was evidently thinking along the same lines.

"But won't it be cool to send Mundus to oblivion a second time?"

Shadow entered the hall and genuflected before Dante. "The leaders are gathered. Please, this way."

Dante slipped Rebellion back into its sheath and moved toward the door. "Stop that," he said half-heartedly. "It's not really my thing."

"That sums up the current situation, sir."

Shadow had shared a brief history of the rebellion and its strategic position, occasionally pausing to allow input from the other leaders. The five men sat in a circle around Dante and Beryl. Each looked like a normal human being, save for the warrior's build and an unusually ferocious aura.

"So my bro-" Dante caught himself. "So Nelo Angelo is dead."

According to Shadow, their commander had come up against the King of the Underworld in single combat but hadn't lived to tell the tale. This clashed with Dante's own memory. He had killed Nelo Angelo in combat back in the human dimension. But that was a different world with different rules.

No matter his thoughts, Dante's expression gave nothing away.

"Yes," Shadow confirmed. "He died several years ago, but the rebellion remains focused."

"On overthrowing the King of the Underworld, yes." Dante nodded sagely. "So explain something to me. If you've been opposed to Mundus for all these years, why haven't you already done something about it? You've easily got enough power to form an independent government."

Shadow raised an eyebrow in response. "You understand the extent of our power?"

"I can see it as clear as day. Even in your pathetic human forms."

"I see. Your insight is as sharp, as might be expected from the brother of our great leader."

At that, the other four men gathered around Dante, clasping hands and smiling meaningfully. Shadow introduced them one by one.

Phantom was a squat bull of a man whose stance betrayed a fire that blazed stronger than the others.

Blade was as thin as his namesake, with a sharp intelligence shining from his eyes.

Griffon reminded Dante of Shadow himself, although he covered his feathers with a striking ceremonial battle mask.

Frost was cloaked in a chilling aura that stamped out every last trace of emotion.

Dante immediately realized he was in the presence of four extraordinary men.

"You asked why we fight to overthrow Mundus under a single banner." Shadow followed up the introductions by returning to business. "We fight to honor our fallen leader Nelo Angelo, and the tragic Dark Knight Sparda."

"Tragic?"

Shadow and the other leaders regarded each other uncertainly. "Master Sparda was betrayed by the humans."

Dante felt his stomach churn. "I don't understand."

Phantom piped up for the first time. "Sparda was the only warrior brave enough to stand between the King of the Underworld's designs on the human world."

It was obviously a story that weighed heavily on the hearts of the assembled soldiers. "Some of the humans quickly

surrendered to the demon king. They deceived and drugged Master Sparda. He was paralyzed when they brought him to Mundus as a tribute."

"That's not true!" Beryl blurted. "I know the legends! Humans helped Sparda to resist the King of the Underworld."

"History ran a different course on your world," Blade admonished. His otherwise taciturn features pinched momentarily. "Master Sparda was executed after the humans delivered him to Mundus. We five made a pact to watch over his widow and two sons."

The room fell silent as Dante and Beryl processed the information. The story had shaken them both in different ways. The idea that humans had betrayed Sparda shook Beryl.

Dante gazed into the far corner of the room with steely eyes and muttered a single word: "Mother."

If Shadow heard, he gave no sign. "We were originally created by Mundus to act as watchers over this dominion. We were the sworn enemies of Sparda himself. But his wife puzzled us. She was only human, but somehow matched Sparda as an equal. Her enormous kindness gives us

strength to this day. She begat Nelo Angelo, our great leader."

Shapeless memories raced through Dante's mind. His mother was his mother, no matter what dimension he found himself in. He recalled her warm smile and instinctively clutched the keepsake amulet he carried at all times. Even now, Dante found it easy to regress to childhood afternoons spent cuddling in her lap whenever he closed his eyes.

She was a generous woman who embraced life without judgment, and because of that she had been accepted by the hero of the demon world. She and Sparda fell in love and produced two children. Dante liked to think that she even gave Sparda peace of mind despite a lifetime of battle.

"That is everything," Shadow said. "I'm sorry, Master Dante."

Dante snapped back to attention and flashed his trademark grin. "Well, at least we know you and I are in a similar position."

Dante knew the five leaders wouldn't be able to marshal their forces to overcome Mundus. The demon king was too cautious and clever to create minions more powerful than himself.

A traditional battle would be suicide, which was probably why the rebels were hiding in the mountains rather than engaged in a campaign. If they were to win, it would require a completely random factor that the King of the Underworld could never have anticipated.

But none of the leaders had asked for Dante's help. They were too delighted to be in the presence of Nelo Angelo's brother to think of anything other than hosting an honored guest. Dante hadn't suggested a battle plan, and Beryl was still too deep in shock to hound him into an alliance.

Not for the first time, the room fell silent. Dante broke the stillness. "We seem to have been transported into your world by a magical tool called the Beastheads. It appears to have the power to shift people between dimensions. Who knows what else it can do?"

Dante looked at each of the five men with surprising passion. "The statue made its way from the demon realm to ours in ancient times. Perhaps this Mundus of yours also has such a statue. Do any of you know what I'm talking about?"

The soldiers exchanged meaningful glances.

"If you know something, don't keep it from me," Dante implored. "I'm serious."

"Yes," Frost stepped forward with considered movement.

"We know of the Beastheads. Obtaining it will not be easy. It exists deep in the seat of Mundus' kingdom. You can access the palace from the demon king's stronghold on your world. The statue is located directly in the heart of the palace."

"In the throne room, obviously." Dante rolled his eyes. "It's always in the throne room. That's all we need to know. You've been very helpful."

"What are you going to do?"

Dante shrugged. "I can't stay here. I've got bills to pay back home, and if I don't get back pronto, I'm going to get an earful from all the chicks who are always calling me for dates. I guess I'll have to take out this world's Mundus, too. Listen, there's something I need to ask you guys."

A mischievous grin broke out over Dante's face. He leaned forward conspiratorially, clapping his hands on the backs of the two nearest soldiers.

"I'm gonna beat down the King of the Underworld. Again. Will you guys back me up?"

"Sneaky."

It was the first thing to slip out of Beryl's mouth once they returned to their room. His proposal had yanked her out of her fugue. "Why couldn't you just have explained why we really need to get the Beastheads? Why do you have to lie about it?"

"The end result is the same. It's more fun this way." Dante was absorbed in cleaning his guns. Ebony and Ivory were scattered in pieces, which he randomly wiped with gauze and grease.

Beryl thudded to the floor in disgust. "Can you even win against the demon king?"

"Who knows?" Dante shrugged. "This Mundus might be stronger than the one I killed, but I'm not the same guy I was, either. I'll tell you what-I'm looking forward to what happens."

"I don't think you should be so laid-back about this. If we lose, we can't ever get back home. If the demon king eats you or something, I'll have to kill him in your stead."

"Hey, now you're cooking with gasoline," Dante quipped. "Why don't you take care of things and I'll stay here and relax."

Beryl sighed with exasperation. Dante was obviously in no mood to take things seriously. She had no idea what was

going through his mind, and she worried that she wasn't carrying her weight. She hauled out her rifle and began stripping it into parts for cleaning.

In this world, it was humans who brought Sparda down. The revelation had burrowed deep into her. She had known people who, driven by weakness, had transformed into demons. The wretched Beastheads had corrupted her father, and now it had whisked Beryl herself to a strange parallel universe. Did the demonic object wreak havoc on its human owners? Or was it only a mirror that reflected their true natures?

The men who betrayed Sparda were cowards. We're not the same; me nor Daddy.

Beryl and Dante sat quietly for a while, cleaning their weapons with automatic precision, each absorbed in their own thoughts. It was the first moment of meditation either had enjoyed since entering the new world.

Beryl wondered what thoughts ran through her companion's mind.

"Attack! We're under attack!"

Dante and Beryl shot to their feet at the piercing scream. Beryl raced to the window. What she saw left her stunned.

An undulating wave of gold covered the landscape. It took Beryl a moment to realize what she was seeing. Hundreds of golden-haired women stalked the mountainside, bearing down on the outpost like a tsunami.

"What's happening?"

"This is perfect!" Dante joined Beryl to survey the scene. "I was hoping for someone to play with!" He flashed a grin at his astonished comrade and leapt out the window.

As soon as his feet hit the ground, the golden horde turned in unison to watch Dante. Beryl noticed that each carried a black sword and an expression of frenzied bloodlust.

Dante paid the women no notice. Instead, he focused on a single figure in the distance. The woman stood on an outcropping of rock, elevated above the crowd of warriors surrounding her. She had the bearing of a commander and grasped an enormous sword not unlike Rebellion. Beryl was less shocked by the spectacle than the single word uttered by Dante.

"Trish?"



The figure seemed to have heard the question despite the gulf separating Dante and herself. The woman pointed at the silver-haired warrior with her sword. At that signal, the golden army descended on Dante.

Phase 3

PART 3

Hundreds of rebel soldiers had fallen in behind Dante, loyal to the memory of Nelo Angelo. The demon warriors clashed with the women in a violent display of crimson and gold, but the battle was far from even. It didn't take long for Beryl to recognize that her hosts were being decimated.

The women hefted mystical blades, which tore open their opponents when an ordinary weapon would have left a scratch. The golden warriors seemed to have no fear of death, refusing to break ranks no matter the skill of their opponents. The attackers moved in unison like a single organism.

The demon forces arrayed against the King of the Underworld were well trained and highly disciplined, but it was obvious to Beryl that they lacked tactical combat strength. She surveyed the melee from a platform high above the battle.

"They planned this." Shadow and the other four leaders observed the fracas intently, signaling battle strategies to captains on the ground.



"They must have known we were amassing here."

"We've finally grown big enough to be a real threat to Mundus," Frost said grimly. "He's thrown his strongest warriors against us."

"Reform the battle lines," Shadow ordered. "Casualties are already approaching thirty percent." Shadow rubbed his chin. "Mundus is trying to force us to resort to using our powers. If he can exhaust us in a place where the mystical uncercurrents run thin, we'll be dead before we ever get to the King of the Underworld himself."

"If we lose many more men, we won't be able to reach the demon king anyway!"

Beryl flinched as a pair of boots landed heavily on the platform behind them.

"This sounds serious. I want in." Dante stood coolly on the edge of the observation deck, smiling insouciantly. "I'm guessing you guys have taken temporary forms. Your true bodies are bigger and stronger, right?"

"Yes," said Shadow. "This place was originally the human world. It's been corrupted beyond recognition now. A weak current of magic runs through it. But it's strong enough for us to resume our native forms."

"Would you die?" Dante eyed the leaders cynically.

"No, but we would quickly lose our strength and open ourselves up to the King of the Underworld."

"Didn't I tell you I'd take care of Mundus? If we stand here and do nothing, your rebellion is over. Those women are destroying your men."

The leaders stared at their feet, their reluctance palpable. Dante knew that avoiding their devil forms wasn't solely due to the tenuous grasp that magic had on this world. Mundus had created each of them to serve as soldiers for his cause. Remaining in their new forms was a psychological rejection of their beastly heritage. But this was no time for emotions.

Dante leaned over the edge of the platform and pointed at the ground. "They're right under our noses! Pull yourselves together and get us out of this mess!"

The golden warriors had nearly reached the scaffold, advancing upon the slick red paste of bloody corpses. Each woman dissolved as she was destroyed, replaced with one of the seemingly infinite number of buxom reinforcements.

"There's no end to them! They look like humans, but they can't be!" Beryl squeezed off another round and picked off a warrior just before she could behead an unwitting rebel soldier.

"They're not real," Dante explained. "The bodies are fake, created by magic. The controlling sentience can just create

new ones. We'll have to cut off the source." Dante swung his legs over the side of the scaffold. "Right. Here I go."

He dropped into the chaos, leaving Shadow and the other leaders with their mouths agape. A moment later, Dante was swallowed up by the crowd of beautiful warriors. A moment after that, the women who had thronged upon him shattered into dust.

"Sorry!" Dante sang gleefully. "I didn't see the 'fragile' label. Maybe the guy who made you was slacking off?"

Rebellion easily sliced through the waves of the attackers. But its owner knew it was only a matter of time until the sheer weight of numbers would drive him to exhaustion and he'd make a tactical error.

"Master Dante may be right." Frost watched the silver-haired warrior hack his way through the crowd. "Assuming those abomidable forms could be safe if we only used them for a short period, there should be enough magical energy in this world to allow a limited transformation without fear of death."

"We cannot seal away those memories forever. The past always catches up to us," mused Shadow. "Our gamble would save Master Dante and destroy these attackers. The path to the King of the Underworld would be clearer."

The men nodded in unison. They could not allow Dante to fall to Mundus as Nelo Angelo had-especially if they ever wanted to look into the eyes of the woman who now served as their beacon.

"When we meet Mistress Eva in the netherworld, it will be with heads held high," agreed Phantom.

The soldiers' hands flashed with occult symbols, and reality shifted accordingly.

The rebel forces had been halved by the harpies' attack, overwhelmed by the inexhaustible supply of foes. Beryl had joined Dante on the ground, but she was beginning to reconsider.

"They're unstoppable! Tell me you've got something up your sleeve!" she yelled.

"Magic like this works from the top down. We've got to beat the boss. Supply-side warfare." Dante smirked. "We've got to deal with Trish."

Beryl felt her rifle jam and she swore. She tossed the weapon into its holster and grabbed one of the black swords that now littered the ground. She hadn't sustained any injuries yet, but Beryl knew it was only a matter of time.

Dante didn't ever seem to tire, but she was fatiguing quickly under the incredible onslaught.

She found herself back to back with Dante, only able to focus on a limited radius. Golden warriors surrounded them. Still, she thought, we're doing better than Shadow's men.

"I'm open to ideas," she said. "At this rate, my body's going to pack it in before I'm ready to."

"I do have a vague plan, but it depends on whether Shadow and the others play ball." Dante stole a peek at the scaffold, which was now empty. He sheathed Rebellion and whipped out Ebony and Ivory. The switch threw his opponents off for a moment, giving him an opportunity to spray several dozen women with bullets.

"Fall back!" Dante shouted, dashing into the crowd, "Everyone, back to the outpost!" Dazed rebel soldiers retreated in confusion. Dante remained behind, mowing down enemy warriors with abandon. But the unending waves of reinforcements quickly cut off his escape route. He was isolated in a sea of bloodthirsty women.

Suddenly, an inhuman cry rang out. A giant spider fell onto the battlefield and set about trampling the golden warriors. The creature was made of out living rock; each movement

revealed magma pumping beneath cracks in its joints. It was Phantom, returning to the form created for him as Mundus' apostle.

"I never thought that thing would be on my side!" Dante yelled happily. He dashed underneath the Phantom spider, which promptly attacked his pursuers.

Another demon materialized behind the spider, a silvery giant who cleaved his adversaries with two enormous blades. This was the true form of Frost. Dante knew from experience that his opponents would find themselves in a desperate struggle for their lives.

The demons' appearance rallied the rebel troops. Soldiers swept past Dante; they plunged into the endless tide of female warriors. The silver-haired devil hunter moved to join the rush...but found himself treading in place.

A moment later, Dante realized his feet were no longer on the ground. His body was swooped into the air, clutched in the rough talons of a colossal bird. Griffon's demon form was true to his name.

"Thanks for the lift. You know where I want to be." Dante pointed at the center of the attacking women, where Trish stood barking orders to her troops.

"Kweeeee!" cried Griffon.

Dante could see two more giant creatures below him. He knew the true forms of Blade and Shadow from when he fought them in his own dimension. But here, the pair rallied against the King of the Underworld. One had transformed into a thunderous lizard, while the other took the form of a shadow beast with skin like tar. They decimated the golden warriors who stood in their path.

Seeing the demons regain their true shapes surprised Dante. He had witnessed it all before and taken it in stride. But he had never expected to work alongside them, slaughtering gorgeous women no less. It was a surreal experience he hoped never to repeat.

Griffon had flown close enough that Dante and Trish could see each other clearly. Her face twisted with rage as she readied her enormous sword. Mystical lightning flashed across the blade, and Dante noticed she was brandishing the very weapon he'd used to combat the King of the Underworld in his own world.

He knew that if Trish was victorious, it would mean the end of the rebellion forever.

"Come, you insolent traitor! You who dare defy Lord Mundus. Be proud to die at my hand!"

Dante rolled his eyes. Why do the bad guys always talk like that? Nobody ever talks like that outside of this sort of thing. Does she order like that at restaurants? When she needs a spare square from the next stall, does she order her neighbor to deliver unto her toilet roll of purest silk or face her wrath?

Dante knew the answers to his questions would not be forthcoming. He smiled anyway. This will be the second time I kick your ass.

Wriggling free from Griffon's talons, he dropped to where Trish commanded her warriors, his silver hair flapping wildly. The two stared at each other with quiet malice.

And then they fought.

The battle was epic enough to be described in language Trish would normally use. She would probably say the ground shook beneath their feet. Their blades clashed with peals of thunder and hurricane gales. She might even describe their massive swords in pornographic detail.

Trish wielded a sword called Alastor that was imbued with supernatural powers. Dante knew this because he had once used the weapon himself. It augmented its owner's strength,

enabling Trish to cleave great arcs in the air faster and with more fury than Dante himself was capable of. Infuriatingly, the sword even allowed her to fly. Dante didn't think that was very fair at all, but as usual he put on a brave face.

"Not bad! Nice swordplay."

Dante swung Rebellion in a mighty windmill, but Trish dodged easily and made a play for his chest.

"Pathetic, weakling scum! You disgrace yourself with your playground antics!" Trish sneered.

"Are you kidding me? You really talk like that all the time?"

Dante stumbled backward, unable to gain purchase on the ground before Trish lunged forward with a second thrust. He rolled to one side, annoyed at the special powers granted by Alastor. She's far stronger than the Trish I fought before.

"You dare insult me thus?"

"Swords don't win fights. Even flashy ones," Dante quipped. He lashed out with a roundhouse kick, but Trish blocked the move and responded with a jab to his throat. Dante felt the tip of her sword brush air over him as it passed by.

Alastor sparked a blue bolt that zapped Dante square in the Adam's apple. The disorienting shock was all Trish needed to

land a serious blow. She kicked Dante in the chest with astonishing force. He tumbled backward, gasping for breath.

"Careless dog! You waste my time with the poverty of your skills."

"I agree a man and a woman should tumble much longer before the climax," Dante said brightly. "Ready for the second course?"

Dante rushed toward Trish at blistering speed, Rebellion singing at his side.

His opponent simply stared at him with contempt. "You waste my time with such rash moves!" Trish nimbly evaded the giant sword. But before the stroke was completed, Dante brought Ivory to bear and unleashed a torrent of bullets. Trish deflected the barrage with Alastor.

Dante swung again, and this time Trish anticipated the dual attack. She spun to avoid his blade and brought her own crashing down on Dante's pistol. But he had already dropped the weapon and withdrawn his hand. Too late, she realized it was feint.

Dante pressed Ebony into her temple with his other hand. If I were her, I'd duck and slice.

Trish immediately ducked below the barrel and swung her sword. But Dante's empty hand now grasped Rebellion, which carved deep into her left shoulder. Trish howled in anguish and fell to the ground.

Dante pressed the attack, not wanting to waste his advantage. He emptied Ebony into her kneecaps.

Screaming, Trish hauled herself up with her arms. Her legs might be useless, but Dante knew she could still prove a formidable threat if she launched herself into the air using Alastor's powers.

He couldn't let that happen.

"It's over, Trish." Dante raised Ivory and aimed directly at her forehead. "Again."

A single gunshot rang out across the battlefield.

Beryl heard the shot from her blood-soaked corner of the battlefield. The noise snapped her out of her trance; her automatic reflexes had taken over in the heat of combat. Now she looked around in surprise. The golden warrior women had vanished. The rebel soldiers were scratching their heads in confusion.

Beryl tried to work out what had happened, but quickly abandoned that notion. Nothing had made much sense after

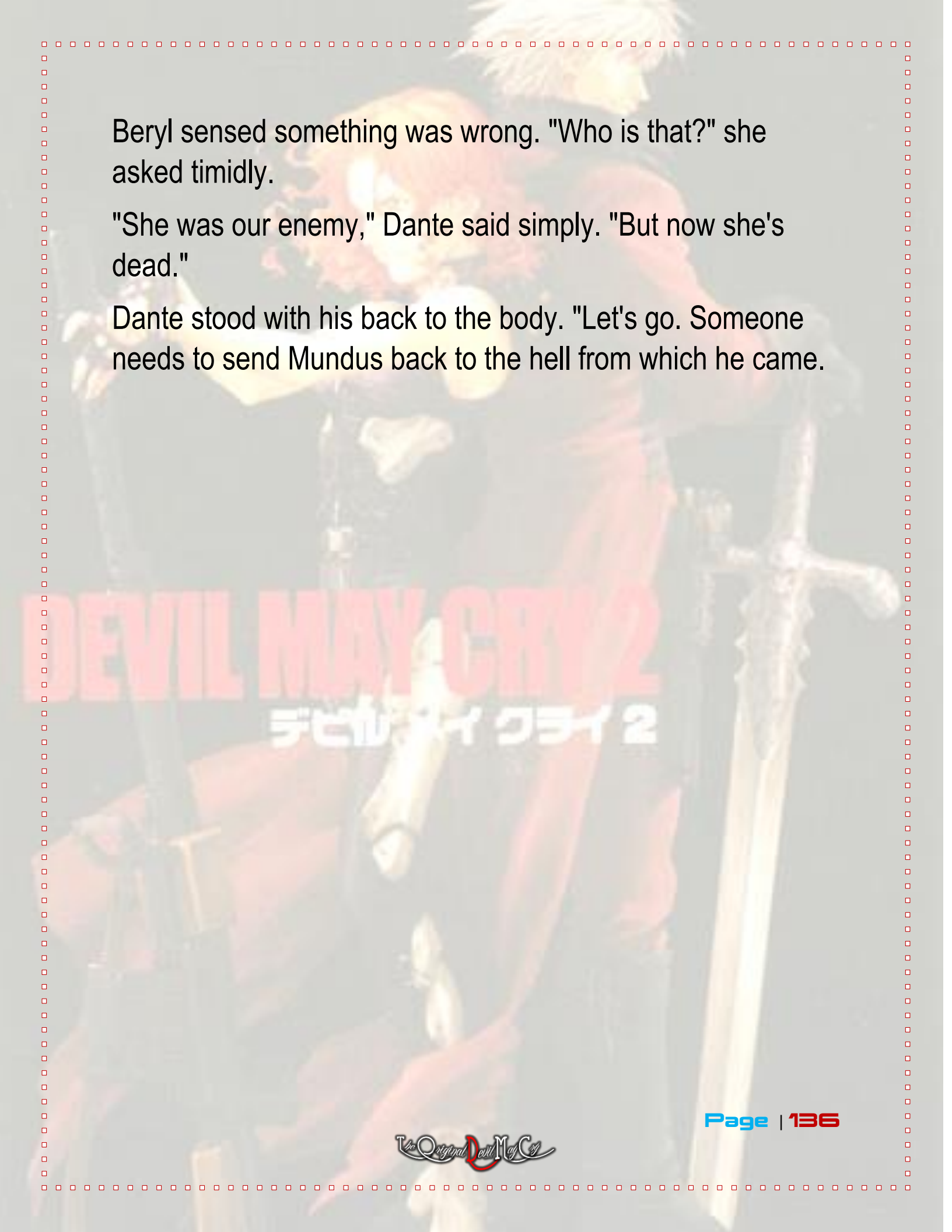
meeting Dante, and she assumed it wasn't going to start now. She cradled her beloved rifle and tried to locate the giant demon forms that Shadow and the other leaders had assumed. But they, too, were missing.

Finally, she spied Dante's silver hair whipping in the acrid breeze that cut through the field. She dashed toward him, ignoring the pained moans of the fallen rebel warriors she passed. When she caught up with Dante, she saw that he was crouching next to the inert body of a beautiful woman. Her crossed arms and closed eyes made it look like she was sleeping, but Beryl could tell by the blood coating her face and uniform that she was dead. At her head, a giant sword rose like a tombstone from the earth.

"Dante! What happened here?"

Dante didn't answer. His face betrayed no sign of the conflict inside. The sight of Trish lying in repose struck an unexpected chord within him. Memories of his slain mother came forth unbidden, triggered by her uncanny likeness to the enemy that Dante had dispatched moments before.

Dante didn't like being the killer any more than he liked being the bystander.



Beryl sensed something was wrong. "Who is that?" she asked timidly.

"She was our enemy," Dante said simply. "But now she's dead."

Dante stood with his back to the body. "Let's go. Someone needs to send Mundus back to the hell from which he came."

Phase 3

PART 4

It's said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Beryl reckoned it was also paved with well-maintained asphalt.

The journey was much smoother than she had anticipated, both literally and metaphorically. The deadly swamps and ravenous monsters describes by stories were nowhere to be found on the way to the King of the Underworld's keep.

Which was just as well, because the rebel forces were in no shape to overcome such obstacles. The battle with the golden-haired warrior women had left four men in five dead or seriously wounded. The clash had even claimed one of the five demon generals; Frost lay dead and the surviving demon lords were so drained of magical energy that they barely clung to life. Nevertheless, Blade and Griffon had agreed to accompany Dante and Beryl to Mundus' kingdom.

Eventually, the ragged militia found themselves standing at the gaping granite maw that burrowed deep into the earth all the way to hell itself.

Dante stepped into the Underworld for a second time.

The sepulchral kingdom was subtly different from the last one he had entered, but Dante was glad to have at least some prior knowledge at his disposal. The uncanny sixth sense that all humans experienced in the presence of demons tickled the back of his skull.

Dante knew that it would only increase as the party journeyed deeper into the Underworld. Most humans felt the sensation as a primal dread that frequently led to insanity.

Dante hadn't expected to march into an abyss with a demon army at his side. His newfound allies found their magical energies replenished the nearer they got to the heart of the Underworld. The demon realms proved a psychic balm for the soldiers, and their spirits rose with each step. Dante hated working in groups, but for once he was glad for the backup.

Nevertheless, readying to fight the demon kind with Blade and Griffon at his side was unsettling at best.

Dante looked over to his human companion. Beryl struggled to avoid succumbing to the atmosphere of despair that characterized the Underworld. She wasn't the first human to enter the Underworld, but part of him hoped she would be the last.

After a while, the monsters attacked.

The sorties didn't stop Dante and the other warriors, who pressed farther into the Underworld despite coming under fire from time to time. Each skirmish decreased their numbers, but the rebels pushed on nonetheless. The demonic energy was so pervasive now that Griffon and the other unholy allies easily dealt with their attackers.

The energy grew stronger as the party neared Mundus' keep. Eventually it proved too overwhelming for the rebel demons. One by one, they fell to their knees, rendered immobile by an overload of mystical undercurrent. Even Blade and Griffon succumbed at last. They collapsed just as the remainder of the party entered an empty granite hall.

"This place," Griffon muttered through clenched teeth. "This place is the king's keep..."

"I understand." Dante placed a hand on Griffon's shoulder. The demon lord's face was creased with pain. Dante knew they must be near the nexus of the Underworld's mystical energy. He sheathed Rebellion and walked toward a door on the far end of the chamber.

"Wait!" Beryl ran after him. "You can't just leave me here!"

Dante didn't acknowledge her. Beryl dashed to his side.

"Stop joking around! I came this far too, you know!"

Dante said nothing.

"I won't get in your way," Beryl implored. "I'm not some weak little girl who's going to run away and cry at the first sign of danger. I'm a Devil Hunter like you!"

Dante paused mid-step and looked Beryl in the eye.

"Do what you like," he said simply.

The two warriors continued the rest of the way across the gargantuan antechamber. The silence was punctuated by the echo of their footfalls and the tense whimpers that came from the demons left behind at the entrance.

The door opened of its own accord as they got closer. The portal revealed an almost palpable darkness. Beryl imagined she could feel hot breath all around her. At least, she hoped she imagined it.

Dante regarded the void with a cynical grin. "Last time, you came out of a dog statue. What are you going to throw at me this time?"

Something rumbled an answer from the darkness.

Dante and Beryl stepped inside the void and vanished.

Chen hadn't moved from his perch for nearly an hour. He didn't even appear to breathe, he saw so still.

He was nestled deep in a lush velvet chair, eyes locked on a glass cabinet before him. The box was roughly the size of a man, which was so convenient because it currently housed one. This particular man was currently made of stone. He rested in the glass box like an exhibition in a museum.

The statue's mouth howled in silent anguish, and its clothes were ragged and torn. The figure was none other than Ducas the Rat.

"Three days," Chen squealed to himself. Three days since the black clouds had formed above the yacht and spat out the Beastheads. Three days since Ducas had fought Dante and Beryl on the cliff. Three days since he had turned to stone and been recovered by Chen's men.

Chen had become obsessed with the stone man in that span. The mystical transformation had awakened a part of him long thought extinct. Ducas was somehow still alive. Stone, yes, but alive all the same. Chen's demon contacts had confirmed that Ducas was alive despite the metamorphosis, while his human scientists swore that the stone was real stone.

"How can you be alive, Mister Ducas?" Chen playfully waved a hand in front of the statue's terrified eyes. "I imagine you would fetch a considerable sum on the open market in your present state. But that would be dull."

Chen hauled himself out of the chair and waddled toward a large window. "Things from the demon world are certainly marvelous, Mister Ducas. There are treasures from there worth having. Worth using."

Chen gazed at the world outside the window, lost in thought. After a moment, he threw his shoulders back and laughed violently. It was an absurd giggle unbecoming of a man of his stature. It was a repulsive mockery of innocence, a twisted quality that would have unwittingly chilled the soul of anyone who hear it.

It was no longer the laughter of a human being.

Beryl heard it.

The laughter echoed through the void, a sound so dark that it couldn't be human. The staccato rhythm grated on her nerves. Beryl gritted her teeth and fought to keep the despair at bay.

Dante had vanished the moment they stepped through the portal. At least, Beryl assumed he had. The blackness was so thick that it seemed to devour light; even Beryl's hand remained imperceptible when held in front of her face. The void left her useless; it was all she could do to keep herself together.

Occasionally she would catch an intuitive flash. Somehow she knew that Dante was out there in the void, fighting the King of the Underworld himself in a desperate battle. Waves of power radiated from the coagulated darkness...Dante and Mundus clashing for the first time-in this world.

Beryl was bitterly ashamed of bragging about her abilities. Her imprudence had cost Dante an ally and opened her up to attack from all sides. It was almost as if the chamber was unwilling to countenance any trespasser not worthy of the demon king. And it had found her worth lacking.

Beryl gripped her beloved rifle, but she didn't have the strength to pull the trigger. She wasn't even sure it would work in this strange place. Her weapon had seen Beryl through many adventures, but it was now no more than a dead twig.

She felt another intuitive flash from the unseen battle.

Beryl was standing on the sidelines of the legend.

The battle was reaching its climax.

Dante faced the King of the Underworld without the slightest hesitation.

"It's lights out, Mundus!"

Dante winced as the words slipped out. Sometimes it's hard to come up with a pithy one-liner during battle, he reflected. It seems so easy in the movies.

Rebellion roared through the darkness, stabbing at the void. It had taken Dante a moment to realize that the void wasn't empty. The void was the king himself. Somehow he knew how to fight it, slashing at the darkness and instinctively avoiding attack.

"That's right. Scream louder!"

Dante whipped Ebony and Ivory from their holsters and spat out a fierce torrent. The bullets sang through the air like tiny silver bells before punching through the king.

The void convulsed, even as Mundus hurled all manner of death at Dante from innumerable arms formed from the

darkness. Swords, arrows, and lightning clattered through the silver-haired warrior.

"I didn't think it would be this easy." Dante laughed. He nimbly danced around the most lethal attacks and then made another play for the demon king.

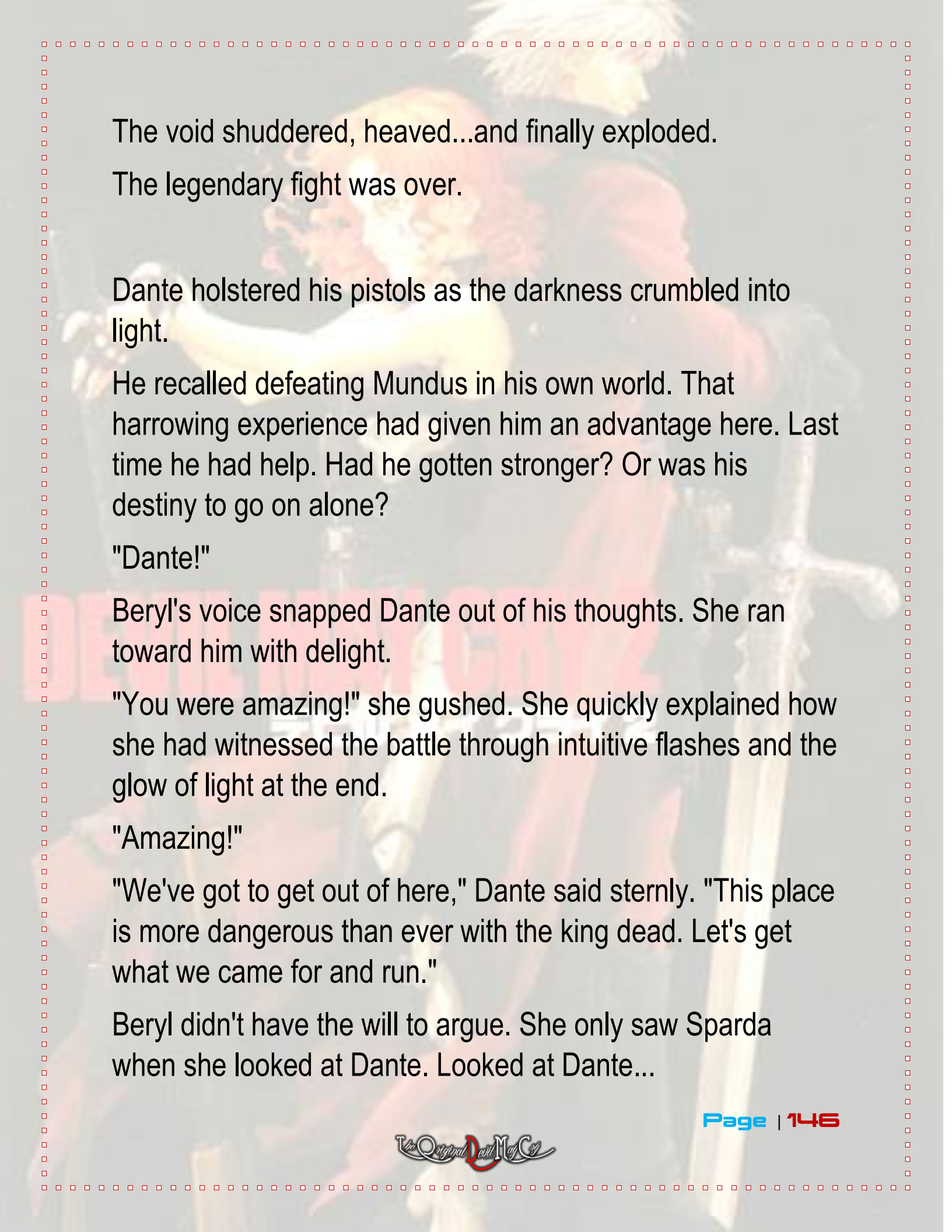
Attacking Mundus in his own keep had proven a masterstroke. The creature could scarcely comprehend the assault. His supremacy was supposed to be absolute; the sole ruler of creation for timeless eternity. Yet here was an arrogant trespasser-human no less-who had power equal to his own.

Always attack when they're sitting on the pot, Dante thought.

Mundus raged coldly, lashing out in idiotic response as Dante rushed in and out to hack and slash his way to victory. The once-mighty King of the Underworld never understood what was happening to him, not even when Dante growled out his parting words and ended the king's life forever.

"Goodbye. All the little demons in hell want to play with you."

Dante drove home the penultimate blow, slicing a gash in the void that shone with brilliant light. A moment later, twin bullets shot out of Ebony and Ivory and disappeared into the crack.

The background of the page features a faded, artistic rendering of Dante and Beryl from the video game Devil May Cry 2. Dante is in the foreground, wearing his signature red coat and holding his sword. Beryl is behind him, also in a red coat, looking towards the viewer. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border of small red squares.

The void shuddered, heaved...and finally exploded.
The legendary fight was over.

Dante holstered his pistols as the darkness crumbled into light.

He recalled defeating Mundus in his own world. That harrowing experience had given him an advantage here. Last time he had help. Had he gotten stronger? Or was his destiny to go on alone?

"Dante!"

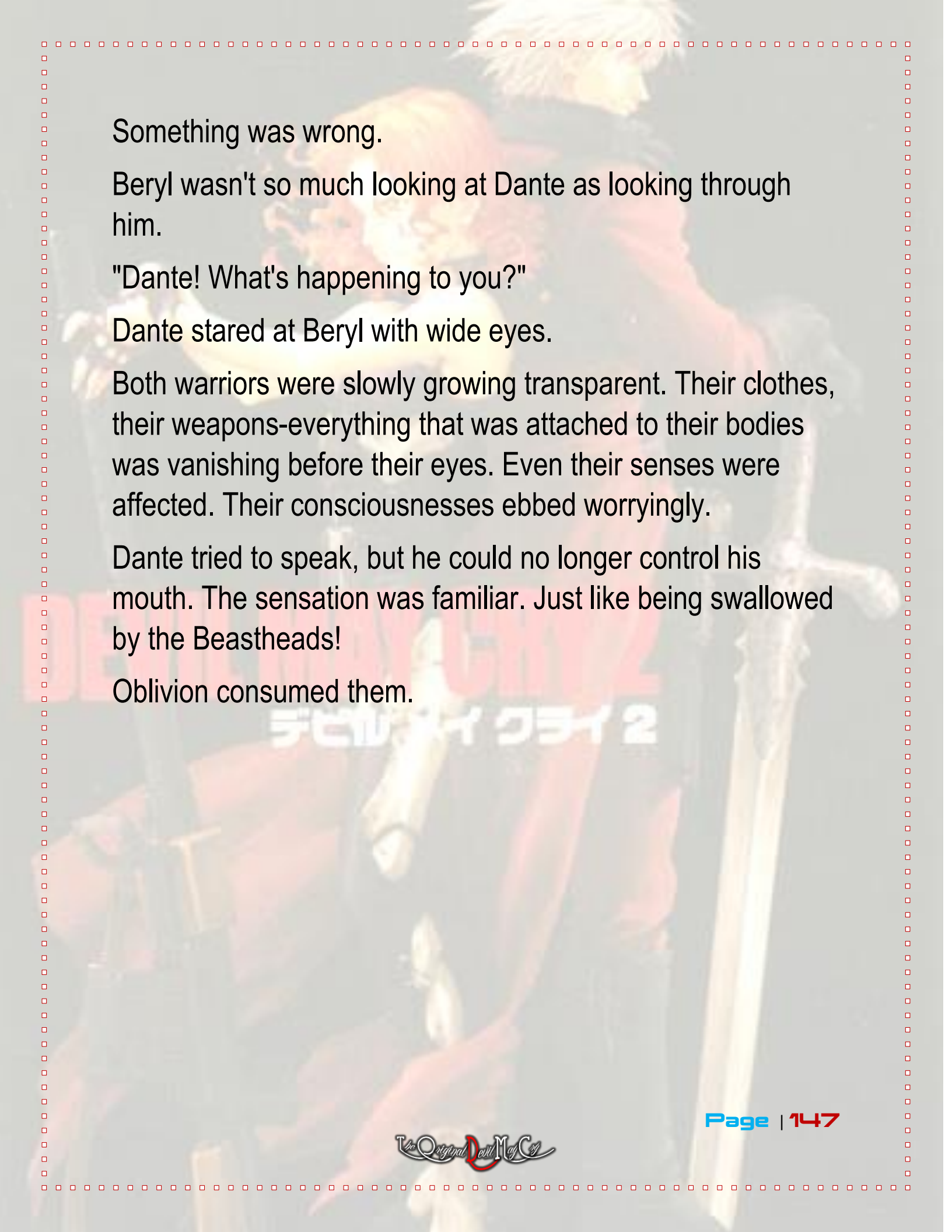
Beryl's voice snapped Dante out of his thoughts. She ran toward him with delight.

"You were amazing!" she gushed. She quickly explained how she had witnessed the battle through intuitive flashes and the glow of light at the end.

"Amazing!"

"We've got to get out of here," Dante said sternly. "This place is more dangerous than ever with the king dead. Let's get what we came for and run."

Beryl didn't have the will to argue. She only saw Sparda when she looked at Dante. Looked at Dante...

The background of the page is a faded, semi-transparent image of Dante and Beryl from the video game Devil May Cry 2. Dante is in the foreground, wearing his signature red coat and holding his sword. Beryl is behind him, also in a red coat. The image is framed by a decorative border of small red squares.

Something was wrong.

Beryl wasn't so much looking at Dante as looking through him.

"Dante! What's happening to you?"

Dante stared at Beryl with wide eyes.

Both warriors were slowly growing transparent. Their clothes, their weapons-everything that was attached to their bodies was vanishing before their eyes. Even their senses were affected. Their consciousnesses ebbed worryingly.

Dante tried to speak, but he could no longer control his mouth. The sensation was familiar. Just like being swallowed by the Beastheads!

Oblivion consumed them.

Phase 4

PART 1

Chaos erupted around Chen almost from the moment he woke up.

Like any person in a position of real power, Chen frequently had more demands on his time than he could handle. This was the nature of his work. The mafia boss was something of a cover story for Chen, and although it took nearly as much energy as his true pursuit did, it was much less dangerous and consuming.

Occasionally his two worlds collided. A lieutenant had alerted him to a problem with a shipment being made to a certain large company. The crates contained a kind of homunculus—an artificial human body created by sorcery rather than science. Chen had long used his experiences with demons and other monsters to develop new revenue streams.

But truthfully, Chen was already bored with that line of business.

Chen had amassed such a fortune in his lifetime that it would probably take several more lives just to spend it all. And money brought power. He was intimate with delegates from leading nations and kept more than his share of secrets with

prominent corporations. Both of these naturally meant he had great influence in the criminal underworlds of various countries. He had, by any capitalist measure, reached the pinnacle of his career.

Nevertheless, he refused to retire. He kept trying to climb the next mountain, driven by an inhuman vitality rarely seen even in the young. Chen possessed an insatiable curiosity. He was only ever able to satisfy it temporarily, obtaining rare objects unknown to most. This in turn spurred his interest in the occult and led to his dalliance in demon eugenics. His passion and drive could have made him a great man, had he been an honest person or even a marginally humane businessman. But instead he had the fortune to be born into a long line of criminals and came into the world from the bottom up.

Even by Chen's standards, the energy rushing through his body now was remarkable. All sense of restraint dropped away as he considered the stony Mister Ducas.

There were some domains no human should touch nor enter. Chen's tragedy was not recognizing this fact...

"I hear Mister Ducas has undergone a change."

Chen waddled into the research lab with his usual grin. The facility was embedded in his mansion, hidden from prying eyes that might otherwise discover its secrets. The institution specialized in demon research. Scientists floated from subject to subject, shrouded in white medical gear. The researchers were as much prisoners as the demons themselves, although Chen afforded them every luxury.

The glass case containing what was left of Ducas had been moved to the lab overnight. Now it stood at the center of a gaggle of scientists, many of whom waved machinery in front of it as if they were dancing or bidding on stock.

Chen made a show of coughing politely. "Should we expect Mister Ducas to return, by any chance?"

"That's impossible," responded one of the masked researchers. "It would be a different story if Ducas were a demon. But we've never seen a human survive petrification. However, he's not exactly inert."

Chen's eyes glimmered. "What do you mean?"

"His volume and weight are decreasing rapidly. We have no real idea where the lost mass is going."

"But you have guesses."

"We have a few theories." The scientist crossed over to a computer and played with the keyboard for a moment. The image of a three-headed statue appeared on the display.

"Ho ho! I don't know whether to say that I was expecting something like this."

"We knew you were looking for it, sir. But we didn't want to give you our thoughts until we had more data. I believe Ducas is actually transforming into the Beastheads."

"How much longer until this happens?"

"If the transformation continues at the present rate, I estimate the Beastheads will be in your possession by tomorrow afternoon."

Chen rubbed his hands in satisfaction. He couldn't actually see the change take place, but he stared tirelessly all the same.

"I've done some very pitiful things to you, young Mister Ducas. But you have shown me how to use the Beastheads and then delivered it unto me. For that, I thank you."

Ducas stood immobile, unable to respond. His face was contorted in pain and surprise, his mouth open in horror. By tomorrow that mouth would be the shape of a dog's muzzle.

"Goodbye, Mister Ducas. For allowing us to properly utilize you; for carrying the Beastheads inside of you; for investigating its mystical application-I am proud to call you Family. Ho ho!"

The maniacal giggle as Chen left the facility served as poor Ducas' requiem.

Dante sputtered back to life.

"Where am I?"

His question was met with silence. Dante lay on a hard wooden floor. A steady drip of water splashed on his face. The smell of something acidic overwhelmed him.

Dante sat up and wiped his face. He patted his body to check for wounds and to make sure his weapons were still in place. The room was dark to make out much detail, but Dante knew he was no longer in Mundus' keep.

"Beryl? Did we get back?"

There was no reply.

Dante hauled himself to his feet. He felt remarkably good for having just taken on the King of the Underworld. But his surroundings left something to be desired. The smell got

worse as time passed, although Dante reckoned that it might be his senses returning to normal.

"How do I get out of here?"

Dante seemed to be in a storeroom or closet of some kind. Cardboard boxes were stacked high on steel shelves. He didn't see any way out, but he decided to follow the acidic smell.

Beryl fancied herself as a Devil Hunter. She could take care of herself.

He hoped.

Beryl had woken up a little earlier than Dante. The first thing she saw was a decaying corpse.

She reflexively jumped back and clutched her rifle. But her surroundings remained still and quiet.

Beryl remembered Dante defeating the King of the Underworld. And then everything faded away. Just like the Beastheads. She wondered if this meant she'd been whisked away from the parallel world.

Where is Dante?

The startling corpse floated limply in a cloudy glass tub, like a specimen soaked in formaldehyde. The room was littered with similar objects. Banks of machinery suggested a laboratory of some kind.

Bery checked herself for injuries. All clear. How is that possible? She stowed her rifle into position on her back. It had been useless in the face of the King of the Underworld, but she always felt better with it nearby. She decided to avoid the creepy humanoid specimens and shuffled to the room's only door.

She pressed an ear against the wood but heard nothing. She twisted the handle and slowly pulled the door ajar. Beyond it was nothing but darkness.

Darkness meant nothing to Beryl now. She had seen the inky blackness that formed the King of the Underworld. That was darkness. This was just the absence of light. Completely different, she reckoned.

The new room was an even bigger lab space. Specimens large and small dotted the room, which was filled with mountains of loose paperwork. Beakers and flasks formed little glass cities. Their function was a mystery to Beryl, but

the paperwork she could understand. Paperwork and test tubes meant she was back home.

Beryl stepped carefully to avoid making any noise. The dimness opened into a darker space up ahead. She couldn't see any other doors, so she made her way toward the blackness. The faint lights of the machinery were of little use in the new chamber. Beryl could feel thick electrical cables snaking across the floor. Stolen patches of light glinted off a row of huge glass vats lined up against one of the walls.

The thought of more specimens didn't thrill her, but Beryl pressed on.

The nearest vat contained a human figure. It appeared to be sleeping rather than dead. The figure floated in a chemical soup. Its pasty white limbs were impossibly long and slender, delicate, as if even a child could reach in and snap those arms in two. The face looked human, but Beryl was more interested in the man's forehead.

Disgust washed over Beryl and she fought to keep the bile down. The man's forehead was split wide open and a grotesque eye had taken root in the center. It was not the eye of a human being. Beryl felt the scar on her chest ache warmly. It was all the confirmation she needed.

The eye was from the demon realm.

Beryl heard the patter of oncoming footsteps and darted behind one of the larger machines. She pulled a small knife from her belt and waited silently. Please just pass. The footsteps drew nearer. Beryl sensed a dangerous aura and tensed for a fight.



If she had to create a ruckus, it would make things more difficult. She still didn't know where she was-or how to get out.

The footsteps were nearly upon her when they stopped. Beryl launched out from behind the machinery and swung savagely. But the knife slammed into something metal and clattered to the ground. Beryl felt the cold mouth of a gun against her temple. She rolled her eyes sideways to get a look at her attacker.

"Dante?"

"That was some greeting. At least you're safe."

Beryl relaxed. She recovered the knife and returned it to her belt, filling Dante in on everything she had seen since waking up. Dante listened dispassionately, focused on the vats.

"What do you think those things are?" He gestured toward the glass tanks on the other side of the room.

"Disgusting," she said simply.

Dante strode to the nearest vat and peered over the side. He could feel faint traces of magical energy radiating from the body. The deformed limbs were probably the side effect of warping the joints and of repeated expansion and

contraction, he reasoned. As with Beryl, it was the eye that intrigued him the most.

Dante thought back to his tussle with Chen's odd Ghost Knights. Each wore a metallic plate over its forehead and lost its ability to fight when the plate was pierced. This must be what was hidden under those plates.

He'd seen these third eyes before, long before he assumed his current name. His coworkers had transformed into monsters with something similar embedded into their bodies.

He nearly spat when she spoke next. "I think this guy is one of the Ghost Knights. Chen must be controlling them through third eyes. Turning them into monsters."

Hatred swelled up inside Dante. This eye and the Beastheads were demonic objects and didn't belong in human hands. Dante had seen what happened to humans who got hold of such power.

"It looks like we're to have to give Chen more than just a greeting," he quipped grimly.

A moment later, an unnatural tremor knocked Dante and Beryl off their feet.



Phase 4

PART 2

The entire building shook violently.

The rest of the city remained still, but the labs were vibrating wildly. The arrhythmic pulses toppled over beakers and researchers alike. But mysteriously, the internal seismographs registered nothing at all.

"It's a tremor!"

"Big, isn't it?" Dante struggled to his feet. "It doesn't feel like an ordinary earthquake."

The two soldiers gripped the wall to avoid falling again. The room bucked and shook, and Dante and Beryl often found their feet knocked into the air.

The rattling didn't shatter Beryl's concentration. She found herself able to remain calm by focusing on her burning scar. If it's burning, that means the Beastheads is still around. Great.

Beryl assumed the statue would be at the epicenter of the tremors. That would mean this is a magical quake. It's part of

a pattern. Beryl tried to make sense out of the shaking rhythm, but it was too complicated. But it's definitely vibrating according to some kind of rule.

Beryl stroked her scar. She couldn't afford to lose another chance at the Beastheads.

"What is all this nonsense?" Chen cried. "Has it begun?"

The staff ran around like confused chickens, hiding under desks and rushing for the exits. Chen simply tottered around with an expression of ecstasy. He could feel it-pure energy bursting forth from the demon world.

The eruption gave him glimpses of shared memories. Grudges, mainly. Chen didn't have the ability to manipulate magic or even perceive it clearly. He lacked the direct links enjoyed by Beryl and even Dante. But he had read more occult manuscripts than anyone alive and was able to intuitively sense what was happening.

"Is this your resurrection? The return of the Beastheads to its original form?"

Chen broke into a run, his fat cheeks flushed like a schoolboy's. He pushed past panicked staff and leapt over crawling scientists. "Ho ho! I am here! I will answer your call!"

A sepulchral voice boomed in the pit of his mind.

Dost thou crave my power?

It was a simple enough question, but Chen couldn't immediately answer. He was overwhelmed with an emotion he'd been chasing after his whole life. It was a high he'd achieved only thrice, an intoxicating feeling that nearly resembled love. The first time he had felt it was upon securing control of the Family at his father's untimely death. He had felt it again the first time he saw a demon with his own eyes, and again when he synthesized his first Ghost Knight. All of his efforts over the years had been dedicated to recapturing this feeling.

And here it was.

"Yes! I want it! I do want that power!"

Chen flung open a door and slid into the lab where he had placed Ducas' stone form.

"Ho ho!" He gaped in amazement, unable to form words. Whatever was going to happen, it would happen right in front of him.

Poor, petrified Ducas was gone, replaced in the glass case by a wavering flame. The cold fire licked at the sides of the

vat. It changed shape and color at random. The heatless flame of the demon world.

A myriad of faces flickered and folded on top of each other beyond the fire. Ducas briefly appeared, and Chen realized they were the faces of everyone who had become linked to the Beastheads over the centuries. Each wore an expression of pain and sorrow, of resentment and rage. The silent display was like a black celebration of suffering. It boasted of demonic dominion over all living souls.

Chen found it delightful.

"Wonderful! It's truly wonderful!" He beamed with excitement.

The cold flame danced in front of him. Lesser men would have succumbed to its unearthly sight. But Chen was too ambitious to be spellbound. The display inspired him, pushing his curiosity to new heights. His intellectual greed knew no bounds. He stepped forward, puncturing the magical pressure that would have repelled anyone else.

Wrong. Thou art wrong. I am...

The voice was sorrowful. Flustered, even.

But Chen could no longer hear it. His soul was completely dominated by insatiable curiosity. It boiled away madly, pushing his body ever closer to the cold flame: As he drew

nearer, the flickering sparked died out. The faces coalesced into a dark clump, which spun regretfully.

Chen reached the case and put his hands on the glass.

The reinforced case shattered. Bulletproof glass exploded into sparkling teardrops, which disappeared before hitting the ground.

"I've longed for this for a long time now," Chen whispered feverishly. He gently reached his hand inside the remains of the case. The dark matter had resolved itself into the shape of the tiny Beastheads statue. Chen tenderly grasped the object.

The tremors immediately subsided.

"I see," Chen whispered soothingly. "You devoured so many humans in this form. I understand now." The statue didn't respond.

Chen peered into its small eyes. "Why don't we start with the future? Tell me what fate has in store for me." He had seen Ducas operate the Beastheads before the unfortunate incident on the yacht. Now he gripped the statue. Vivid images flooded his mind. Even though he knew it was going to happen, he hadn't expected it to be so powerful and immediate.

Chen had no concept of time or space. Image after image assaulted his mind, but he was unable to contextualize them. He stood alone as two shadows converged on him. One carried a huge rifle while another wielded two massive pistols and a remarkable red jacket.

Dante and Beryl. They're alive.

Chen snapped back into reality when he heard two sets of approaching footsteps.

Already? Chen giggled to himself. If the footsteps heralded Dante and Beryl, it would merely show the Beastheads had correctly predicted the future. That meant its other powers were ripe for use. "Ho ho! I suppose I should announce my presence like the big bad boss that I am!"

"You sound like a pervert with that giggle." Dante strode into the lab.

"Oh, no. I just thought I'd give you an appropriate reception. Aren't we supposed to trade banter before fighting? I think that's how it's always done."

"I guess this is our welcome back party."

Dante stopped short in front of Chen and narrowed his eyes in what he hoped was a dramatic expression. A moment

later, Beryl joined him. The three figures faced off in the near darkness.

Beryl finally broke the silence. Her scar was ablaze. "You revived the Beastheads, didn't you?" She stroked the wound. "You didn't just revive it. What happened to Ducas?"

Chen put a hand to his mouth. "Eaten, of course. Speaking of which, I understand a similar fate befell your father. Ho ho!"

"You'll have to do better than that to rile me," Beryl hissed. "I almost feel sorry for you, you fat bastard. If you ate Ducas, you're sure to get heartburn any minute now."

A pair of clicks cut Beryl off. Dante pointed Ebony and Ivory directly at Chen's enormous chest. "That thing won't do what you want it to do. It was brought into this world by demons."

"Oh yes," Chen agreed jovially. "Demons have so many uses, don't you find?"

He snapped his fingers, and dozens of shadows appeared between him and Dante.

"Ghost Knights?" Dante was genuinely dumbfounded. "I thought I killed them all. The rest are in your little test tubes."

"I've got enough to keep you busy for a few years."

"Can we stop talking now?" Beryl snapped irritably. She swung her rifle into position and squeezed the trigger.

A number of Ghost Knights materialized in front of Chen to serve as a shield, each one unconcerned about dying. The others spread out through the lab and returned fire.

Beryl simply smiled. "The secret is already out, boys!" She aimed at the nearest Knight's forehead plate and fired. He dropped lifelessly to the floor.

Astonishingly, so did the rest.

"My word, is that irritating," Chen clucked. "I used to boast so much about my Ghost Knights. How did you do that, young lady?"

"I saw the King of the Underworld die. We know a little something about demonic possession." Beryl didn't see why Chen had to know the whole truth. She plucked a series of shiny blue bullets from her pocket. "These have been specially forged to absorb and destroy magic. I had some made for me in the demon world. It looks like your toys don't like them very much."

"What?" Dante turned on Beryl angrily. "You had those? Thanks for telling me!"

"They're specially designed for the caliber of my rifle. When you explained the deal with that creepy specimen back there, I figured they'd come in handy."

Beryl popped the ammunition into her rifle and turned back to face Chen. "Oh yeah. You should probably know that we've destroyed all your lab rats back there."

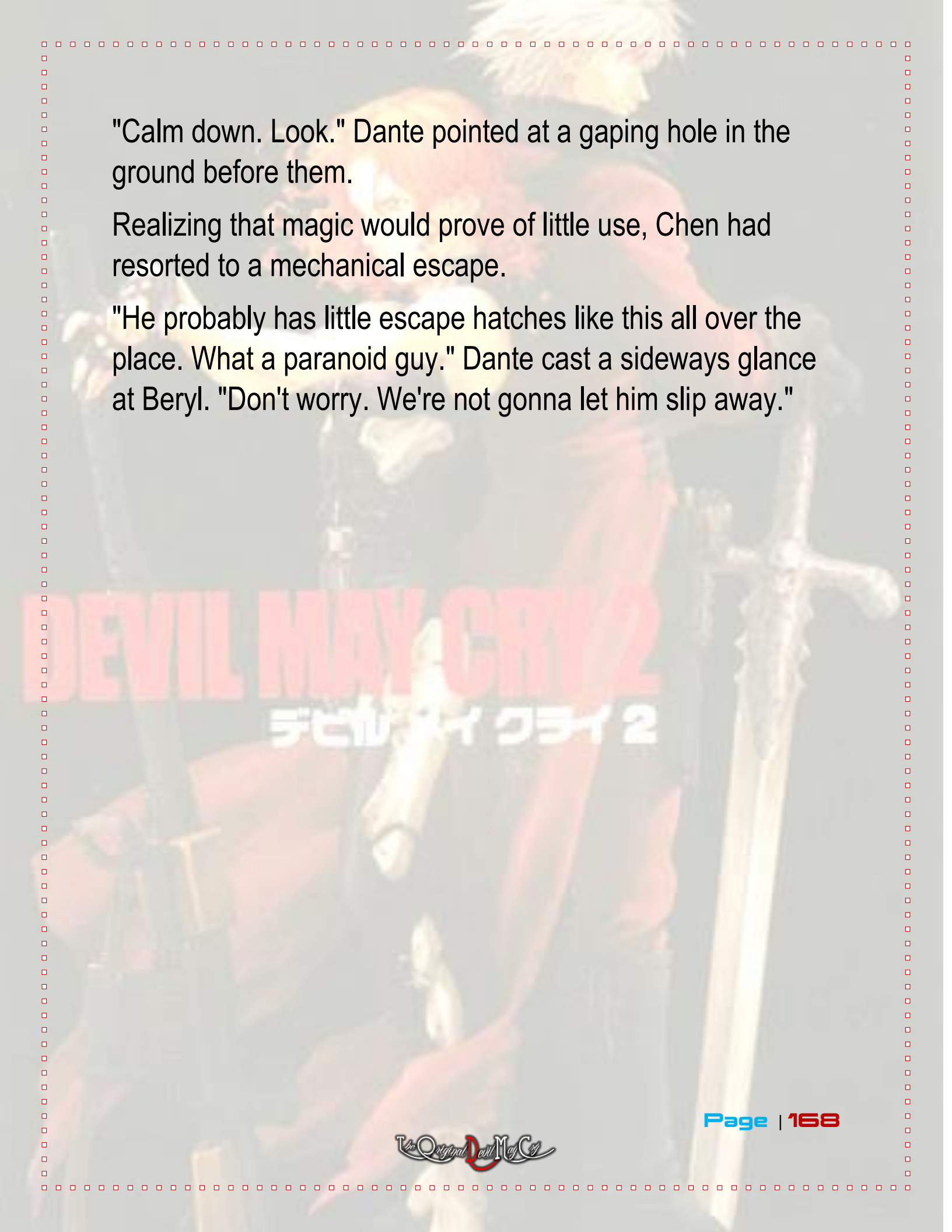
"Well that certainly leaves me in a pickle," Chen said. "I assume that means it's just the three of us now. The three of us and the Beastheads, of course."

Beryl said nothing. She casually pointed her rifle at Chen and fired off five rounds.

Dante could feel the effect of the enchanted bullets. He was imbued with a degree of magical energy from his links to the demon world. Although he wouldn't die if it vanished, he'd certainly find it difficult to display the superhuman fighting abilities for which he was famous for if he ever lost that connection.

Chen simply smiled. "I suppose I'd better run away." He vanished. The bullets tore through the air and demolished the far wall with a thunderous explosion.

"Where did you run to, you coward?!" Beryl screamed.



"Calm down. Look." Dante pointed at a gaping hole in the ground before them.

Realizing that magic would prove of little use, Chen had resorted to a mechanical escape.

"He probably has little escape hatches like this all over the place. What a paranoid guy." Dante cast a sideways glance at Beryl. "Don't worry. We're not gonna let him slip away."

Phase 4

PART 3

Chen was furious, despite his jovial demeanor. He hadn't considered the possibility that Dante and Beryl would have taken out the Ghost Knights. But he knew it was only a matter of time until his plans came to fruition. The power of the Beastheads had told him when to flee. He'd activated the escape hatch the moment he saw his earlier vision come to pass. Now he understood how to use the Beastheads.

The escape chute returned Chen to his living room. He crossed over to a giant mahogany desk. Ancient manuscripts papered its surface, recording demon history from more than two millennia past.

Suddenly, a telephone rang.

"Master Chen. The Uroboros Corporation is on the other line. Regarding the Ghost Knights, sir. They have a question about selling our patents covering the production of homunculi. What would you like me to do?"

Chen wiped a tear from his eye. Demonic tremors and the slaughter of the Ghost Knights couldn't keep his receptionist from doing her duties. Good staff was priceless. "What perfect timing, Miss Hansborough. Transfer our entire Ghost Knights

research department to them. I am no longer interested in continuing that product line."

Chen replaced the handset in its cradle and returned his attention to the ancient writings. If the Ghost Knights could be defeated by Beryl's magic bullets, he had no use for them. Selling the department would at least prove a small victory. The money couldn't hurt, either.

His eyes became glued to a certain page spelling out the epic battle between the King of the Underworld and forces led by the Dark Knight Sparda. Although the story was legendary among the criminal element, this particular page contained a detail he'd never encountered elsewhere.

"During the battle between Sparda and Demon King Mundus, the King of the Underworld's forces devised the following strategies," he read aloud.

Chen clutched the Beastheads in his right hand. He had read the book so many times over the years that he was almost sick of it. He had tasked a team of occult experts to comb the documents for hidden knowledge and memorized every last fragment, not letting a single word slip from his memory. But he had never actually understood it before now.

Chen had thought that the Beastheads would make him Sparda's equal. He'd envisioned harnessing the statue's power to become immortal and to assume complete mastery of the demon world. He had even tapped poor Mister Ducas to seek out and demonstrate the operation of the Beastheads. Chen watched as the statue assimilated Ducas and used its power to banish Dante and Beryl to another world.

If I were an ordinary man, that power would be enough, he thought. But he knew his prodigious curiosity would never be satiated by that limited knowledge. He no longer thought in terms of application and ambition. He simply wanted to know.

Why didn't the Beastheads try to assimilate Mundus and his demons? Were there being capable of resisting its power? What was the difference its victims and the others?

Those thoughts had plagued him for years. Chen looked back at the document he had just read. "The demon form is generally immune to the power of the Beastheads." The creature that had brought the statue to the annihilated temple had not been absorbed as Chen previously believed. Even now, it roamed free.

Still, he needed confirmation. Chen knew something of Dante's origins. If an ordinary human such as himself could resist and control the Beastheads, what would happen if someone with demon blood tried? An experiment is necessary, he reckoned.

When Chen had used the Beastheads to predict the future, he had seen a brief glimpse of Dante submitting to him. He recalled Dante flinching slightly when Beryl fired off her enchanted bullets.

Chen laughed rapturously at the plan formulating in his mind. The noise was pure and untainted by malice.

It sounded like the laugh of the King of the Underworld.

Dante and Beryl had jumped into the escape chute without thinking things through.

The tunnel was connected to a warren of passageways, and Chen could have headed down any of them. So they decided to use Beryl's wound as a sort of divining rod.

"This way, I think. It aches the most." Beryl pointed down one of the tunnels.

"Well if it doesn't pan out, we can always just blow up the whole building."

Every so often the tunnels would exit into another research lab where scientists hurriedly packed up their equipment. The reaction was the same each time Dante or Beryl poked their head into the room. The scientists would freeze in terror and then run away. Neither warrior could understand why they hadn't stumbled into a fight.

"I've got a bad feeling about this, Dante. We're being toyed with."

"Yeah, we probably are. It's always easier when the other side sticks to the script," he grumbled. "Squaring off with Chen is strange. I can't figure him out."

"There's nothing to figure out. He's a mob boss and he's got the Beastheads."

"But he's so cheery."

"Maybe he always remembers to eat breakfast." Beryl grimaced and stroked her scar. "I think we're almost there. Through those doors."

The doors opened to a wide foyer. It was simple yet refined. Several elegant sculptures lined either side of a sturdy black

door at the far end. Both warriors knew Chen would be on the other side. There were no signs of any other people.

"It's obviously a trap," Dante pointed out.

Beryl dropped to her knees. The pain radiating from her scar was almost unbearable. The Beastheads was close.

"You wait here. I'm gonna have a look," Dante said. He casually strolled across the foyer. Dante had only reached the halfway point when the floor opened up beneath his feet to reveal a hissing pool of some liquid or other. Dante leapt high into the air just before his feet lost purchase.

The second trap sprang into play almost immediately. A volley of spears shot out of the wall. Dante managed to dodge them and find a place to land. As soon as his feet hit the ground, the marble ceiling above him broke away and crashed to the floor. Dante spun out of the way at the last possible moment.

Something's wrong. My reflexes are slowing.



Dante knew these traps should have been child's play for him. But as each second passed, his body grew heavier. Or maybe it was the air getting thicker. Each trap was that much more difficult to avoid than the one before it. Dante's mind raced furiously. Was he sick? Was it poison?

He couldn't recall anything. It's the room itself.

"Interesting plan, Chen!" He saw my reaction to Beryl's enchanted bullets! He must have a machine capable of draining magic. "It doesn't do much to these!"

Dante whipped out Ebony and Ivory and blasted the door into splinters. He avoided one final trap and slid into the room like a baseball player grabbing home plate.

Which had been Chen's plan all along?

Dante plunged into a cool, gelatinous prison. The form completely enveloped him. Dante floated lamely in the mass, unable to control his body. The goop forced itself into his mouth and nostrils and trickled sickeningly down his throat.

"Ho ho! Now we can finally have some alone time."

Chen came into view. The jelly gave everything a sparkling blue sheen.

"I don't really need to tell you this, but the magical power of the Beastheads is so mighty that it exceeds all common sense. I imagine your lady friend is so afflicted by her scar that she's unable to get any closer on her own." Chen fiddled with the tiny statue in his hands.

The gel descended into Dante's stomach and began writhing violently. The sensation made him sick, but he was unable to vomit. Dante had been faced with helplessness before, but nothing this humiliating.

"I've caught myself a devil! Nullifying magical powers is my special trick, you know. I've spent years examining demons; I know how to handle them. This gel functions as a preservative for my specimens." Chen was now standing so close that his nose practically touched the jelly. He had the feverish eyes of a virgin discovering true love.

Dante had never known anyone so creepy. For a moment, he hankered for an epic smackdown between himself and the armies of the King of the Underworld. Anything would be better than listening to this smiling freak while suspended in gel.

Chen opened his eyes wide and whispered theatrically. "And now I shall offer you the Beastheads. Will it devour you like a human? Or will you resist like a demon? I look forward to this grand experiment!"

Dante didn't know how to respond to this, so he just grimaced.

Chen plunged the Beastheads through the gel and into Dante's side. Each of the statue's three heads came to life and bit deep into his body. He convulsed in pain.

Dante saw visions of a very young King of the Underworld, his body raging with pulsating magical energy. He saw flashes of Mundus commanding an infinite army of demon troops to overwhelm the human world without challenge.

It was a mental snapshot of a war two thousand years ago, one that Dante had heard through stories and legend. He didn't understand why the Beastheads shared this memory. Did it belong to someone who was there all those centuries ago?

Ducas had peered into the future and had his existence drained away in response. Chen had seen the agonized faces of thousands of people who had shared the same fate as Ducas after he revived the occult statue. But something different was happening to Dante.

Searing heat welled up inside him, but the omnipresent gel acted as a counterbalance against it. Dante's body was recovering its lost strength, fueled by the dark power of the Beastheads interacting with his demonic nature. He recalled

Beryl's story about the temple; she had fired at the demon holding the Beastheads to no effect.

"This!" Chen cried. "This is the glory of the Beastheads!"

Dante realized what was happening. His powers restored in full, the Beastheads retracted its fangs and reverted to stone.

I don't think you understand, Chen.

Dante watched Chen's jaw drop as he unsheathed Rebellion while still inside the jelly. He used the sword to carve a path through the blob.

Suddenly, Chen drew himself up. "I see."

And in that moment, he and Dante both understood the reason why the Beastheads had never assimilated any of the demons that had carried it. It was the same reason Dante was able to carve his way through the gel coffin and stand in front of Chen.

"The Beastheads eats us humans and replenishes you demons. It's like a power transformer for souls!"

"Probably." Dante shrugged. The power that now imbued him felt neither good nor evil. It simply was.

Whoever wielded it could reshape reality to its own design, for better or for worse.

"Ho ho! A fascinating conclusion. I should patent this. A process for transforming humans into a basic magical energy. My company has some hard work ahead of it." Chen's eyes were moist with tears.

Dante thought that Chen was a horrifying specimen of humanity. Even now, faced with certain death at Dante's hands, Chen could only focus on his own intellectual lust.

"How grand! I shall start the research immediately!" Chen toddled off in excitement. "Hey! Wait!" Dante was confused. "I don't know if you're normally this crazy or if this is just a trick. But we both know I'm not going to let you walk out of here with the Beastheads."

Chen stopped. He turned his head, smiling evilly. "You mean to take it from me?"

"Yeah."

"By force, I imagine."

"Yeah."

Chen giggled. Dante found the entire scene disconcerting. Chen had no weapons or protection, while Dante wielded the tremendous power restored by the Beastheads.

"You know," Chen finally said. "I had almost decided to let you live."

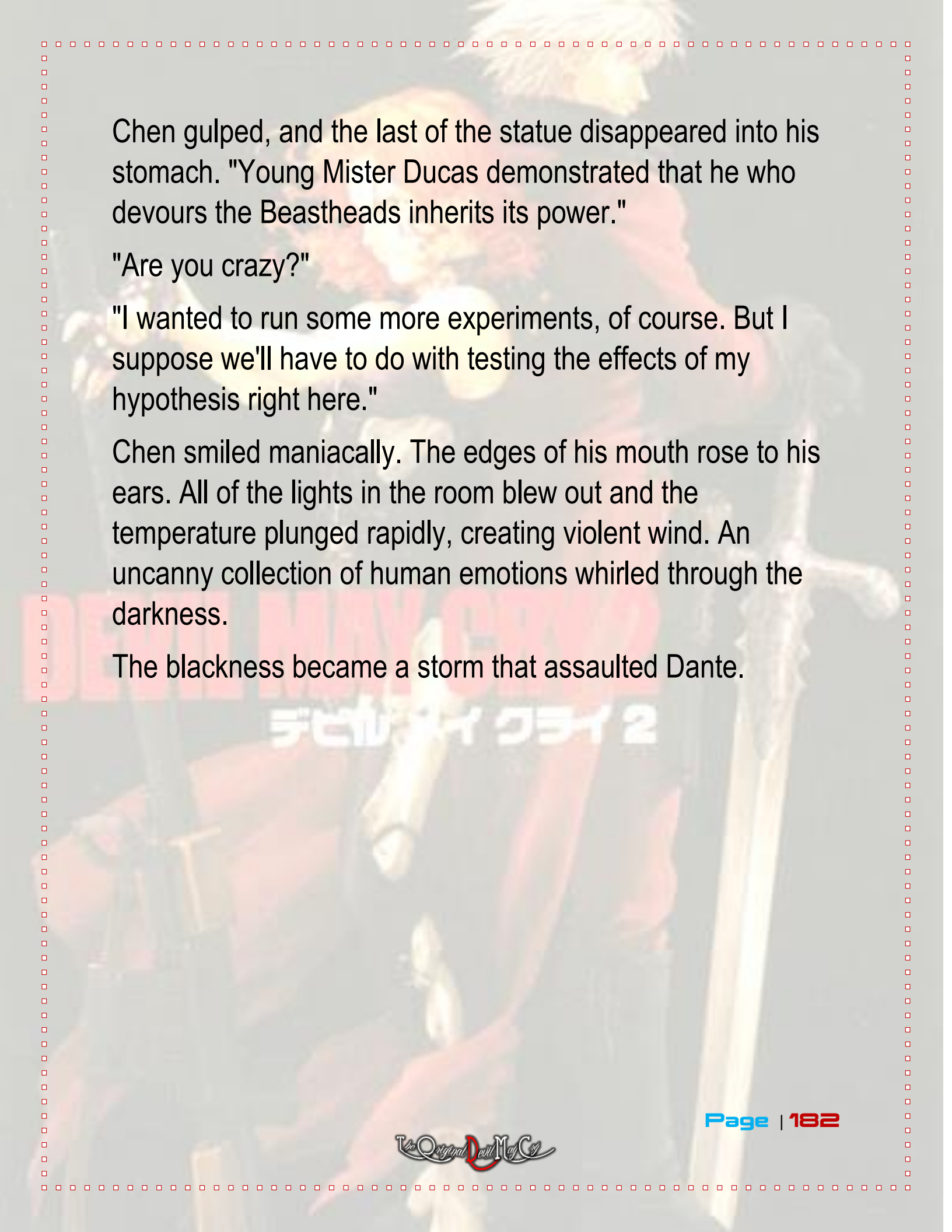
The comment flummoxed Dante. Chen appeared utterly powerless, but took on the tone of someone supremely confident of his position.

Chen turned around to face Dante completely. He raised the Beastheads in one hand. "I'm afraid you left me with no choice."

Dante wasn't sure what he was expecting to happen, but his adversary's next move certainly wasn't it. Chen opened his mouth wide and tossed the Beastheads into it. He chomped down vigorously and began grinding it into powder with his impeccable teeth.

"What's that supposed to do?" Dante asked.

Chen munched on the statue. "Ever since I was a young boy, I pushed myself beyond my limits. My body has endured unimaginable trials. I am now seventy percent demon. Did you think I would let my research go to waste? And now you've proven to me how to harness the power of the Beastheads. It doesn't hurt those with demon blood."



Chen gulped, and the last of the statue disappeared into his stomach. "Young Mister Ducas demonstrated that he who devours the Beastheads inherits its power."

"Are you crazy?"

"I wanted to run some more experiments, of course. But I suppose we'll have to do with testing the effects of my hypothesis right here."

Chen smiled maniacally. The edges of his mouth rose to his ears. All of the lights in the room blew out and the temperature plunged rapidly, creating violent wind. An uncanny collection of human emotions whirled through the darkness.

The blackness became a storm that assaulted Dante.

Phase 4

PART 4

Beryl watched everything through the shattered door.

Rage burned in her eyes, but the inflamed scar kept her at bay. The pain of moving forward even a millimeter seared so badly that it broke her concentration. Not again! Beryl had sat idly by while Dante took on the King of the Underworld in the demon realm. She had been unable to move in the void, crippled by the pain of her scar.

And here she was, replaying the same scene with Chen. Beryl was determined not to leave Dante alone to fight the Beastheads. I am a Devil Hunter! Her heart pounded with life.

"Gah!" Beryl squealed with pain as she extended her right arm.

The standoff between Dante and Chen intensified.

Chen looked the same after eating the Beastheads, but something was clearly occurring deep within him. "I see. Devils are uplifted by this kind of feeling." Chen nodded as if confirming something he had always suspected.

Dante could sense a change in the other man's aura. He was no longer purely human, but not a demon either. Chen emitted a powerful magic that lacked the wicked blackness of the Underworld. His aura was green with immeasurable lust for power and knowledge.

I want to know.

I want to know it all.

The reason for everything.

I want infinite knowledge. From the moment of creation to the final death rattle of the universe.

I want to explore the limit of knowledge.

I want to go to the end!

"You're certainly an eager student-I'll give you that much."

Dante had somehow heard Chen's psychic rant. It implied a degree of power that troubled him.

"Ho ho! I surprise even myself. And to think I once considered just living an interesting life. This craving for knowledge will transform me into a god!"

Strange energy danced around the room, colliding in on itself in a magical storm-Dante and Chen stood calmly in the eye.

Their light banter hid a steely undercurrent. Both men knew Chen was now Dante's equal...and possibly his superior.

"How would you prefer to go, my friend? I would prefer to kill you in a way that preserved you as a specimen for my collection, but you've earned the privilege of choice."

"These bad jokes are ruining the mood," Dante quipped. In the span of a second, he had sliced Rebellion across Chen's side, drawing blood.

"You sure are a violent person. The sword has always been a boring method of attack. Physical strength is so overrated."

Chen vanished.

Dante looked around frantically. Suddenly, he sensed an attack from behind. He threw himself to one side just as a massive sword cut through the place where he'd been standing.

"Not bad!" Dante said.

"Ho ho! I suppose I should respond on your level. Infinite knowledge includes the use of a blade, of course." Chen sprung at Dante with frightening speed.

Dante narrowly brushed aside the attack, but failed to evade the kick that followed it. He fell to the ground, but used the

momentum to roll forward and grab Chen's leg. He crushed the limb into a useless pulp without hesitation. But the opportunity was merely a ploy. Chen grabbed Dante's exposed arm and broke it in two places. Dante howled in anguish.

"Most impressive," Chen marveled, displaying no sign of pain. "Although between us, I'm surprised to see you sacrifice your left arm merely to disable my movements."

"You're no amateur. Those reactions are faster than nerve reflexes. It takes a lifetime of training to make those moves. Who did you steal them from?"

Chen claimed to be seventy percent demon now. Dante knew he must have given himself other attributes as well. Surgically. He was a patchwork man, made up of other people's skill and experience.

"Do you really not recognize your father's skills?"

Dante's veins turned to ice.

"Think of it as a showdown between father and son," Chen continued. "It's a reunion that wouldn't have been possible even if you wished for it. Ho ho! And now, Dante, you will taste the sword of the hero who saved mankind."

Chen closed the gap between them with great speed, ignoring his broken leg. He had somehow obtained the valiant weapon of Dante's father, the Dark Knight Sparda. However it was accomplished, Chen attacked with the same moves and skill that Dante had been beaten with when young.

Dante knew he wouldn't be able to last long against his father's skills-especially not with just one good arm. Rebellion would be of little use now. He whipped out Ebony and spat out a line of fire.

The volley missed Chen but made him abort to attack. Dante realized the power of the Beastheads meant that his adversary could foresee every mode of attack before Dante even knew he would make it. He was screwed.

Chen saw the revelation dawn on Dante's face. "And now you understand. But it comes too late!" He slashed at Dante, who only barely managed to deflect the blow with his pistol. The blade impacted with a clanging noise that left Dante in no doubt that Ebony was ruined.

"You're really beginning to annoy me," Dante grumbled. His mind flashed back to his battles with Nelo Angelo. Both brothers had inherited their father's swordsmanship. Dante

had ultimately defeated him, but it had not been easy. Chen's movements were superficially similar, but lacked soul.

Somehow, that enraged Dante all the more. He wasn't sentimental about his father's sword. Whether it was real or a replica made no difference to him. But appropriating the family swordsmanship was something else. Dante felt an emotion bubble up inside of him, a feeling he had thrown away the day he cast off his name and chose to live as a human mercenary. It was an emotion that powered his sarcastic mask.

"Time to show you the terror of a real demon sword."

The clashing auras raged throughout the room. Each warrior's magical energy crashed and thundered, demolishing walls and throwing furniture into the air. The entire building creaked amid the fury, exhibiting a quality inanimate objects were not supposed to possess. Absolute fear.

By now, even Chen's most loyal employees had decided the time was ripe for running. Nobody knew what was happening, but every last man and woman instinctively understood it was time to flee.

Beryl crawled toward Chen's quarters one inch at a time. Her breathing was erratic and raspy, but something deep inside pushed her past the pain. Dante had set off all the traps in the foyer, although the fresh destruction wrought by the current battle posed new threats. Slabs of ceiling and wall crashed around her, and the floor randomly opened up at intervals.

Beryl was determined to put an end to these events herself. She had come this far and was determined to see it through. But the Beastheads interfered with her scar, sending out almost physical waves to repel her.

She used her beloved rifle as a crutch and hauled herself to her feet. It was a battle of demons, but Beryl knew she had to show them both the power of a human.

After what seemed like an eternity, she finally made it to the threshold. "A little late," she wheezed, "but I'm here now." She flung herself into the room, pushing past the Beastheads energy.

"Die, Chen!"

Dante felt it needed to be said. He slammed Rebellion into Chen's sword. The weapons clacked back and forth a few times before the rising energy pushed both men apart.

"You're certainly tenacious," Chen offered. "But you seem to have forgotten I have the Beastheads in my belly."

"If you can read all of my moves, how come you haven't won yet?"

"That isn't the limit of my power now." Chen fended off another blow and then thrust out his left hand.

A beam of intense light shot out from his palm and punched Dante into the air. The silver-haired warrior responded with a blast from Ivory, but Chen easily evaded the barrage.

"When I had demon tissue transplanted into my body, I had the rewarding experience of painstakingly selecting the transplant sources. I journeyed to the ruins of every temple in the world, gathering the articles left behind by Sparda two thousand years ago." Chen's eyes lost focus.

Dante stood panting on the far side of the room.

"It would have been nice to have found Sparda's grave, but then the legends never said whether he was buried. It was sheer good fortune to find a genetic sample on his own

blade." Chen smiled, baiting Dante with his casual demeanor.

"And so you cloned my father like a rat in your lab. You must have spent a great deal of time and money, Chen."

"To live forever. To satisfy my curiosity. One cannot place a value on these things," Chen demurred. "But the body of a devil held special appeal. And now thanks to your father, I've gained the power to remove an obstacle such as yourself."

Chen stepped toward Dante. His broken leg had already healed. "What's wrong? Your breath is heavy, and your arm seems to be taking its toll."

Physical injuries rarely impacted Dante's sarcasm. It had a power source all its own. "I'd just feel guilty if I didn't give you a handicap."

"A magnificent bluff! But this game grows tiring. Let us end it now!" Chen dissolved into a blur, launching into a sprint faster than the human eye could follow.

I wanted to make you into a fine specimen for experimentation. But you seem a little too weak to survive my tests for long.

Just like poor Ducas.

The background of the page is a faded, artistic rendering of Dante from Devil May Cry 2. He is shown from the waist up, wearing his signature red coat and black shirt, with his signature spiky blonde hair. He is holding his sword, Rebellion, which is a long, ornate blade with a cross-guard. The overall tone is dark and moody, with a focus on Dante's character.

Poor Dante.

Pitiful Dante.

You don't even reach the bottom of your father's feet.

Your fate is here and now.

Dante.

The name of a weakling.

Dante was scarcely able to keep track of Chen, who rushed here and there in bewildering streaks to deliver his insults.

DEVIL MAY CRY 2
デビル・メイ・クライ 2



Dante closed his eyes and waited intently.

Poor Dante.

Pitiful Dante.

Let's end it now, shall we?

Farewell.

The blurred vision of Chen grabbed his sword and waved it high in the air.

This is goodbye, Dante!

"I've had enough of your crap, Chen." Dante hurled Rebellion into the center of Chen's forehead. Chen burbled in response, spitting blood from his mouth. Dante tugged on the hilt of his sword and split Chen's head in two.

At that same moment, his adversary's sword plunged into Dante's right arm.

"I must be tired to open myself up to that," Dante remarked. Chen just gurgled.

Dante's new wound meant both his arms were now useless. Neither sword nor gun was an option now. "I guess I'll just have to kick you to death."

But Chen didn't seem interested in dying. His body boiled unnaturally, pulling his head down into his chest and replacing it with three canine snouts. A huge lump on his back exploded into black wings. Chen's body contorted as the Beastheads fought to save itself.

"You're such a bad loser!" Dante struck out, trying to kick Chen's body, but the creature dodged the blows. It still

grasped its sword in one hand, and now it turned the blade's attention to Dante once more.

Dante wasn't sure he liked his odds. The strength given to him by the Beastheads was gone now. His arms were virtually useless, although Dante reckoned he could use momentum and body weight to his advantage and pull off a single stabbing. He would have to make his blow worth it. He feebly wrapped his bloodied right hand around Rebellion.

I'm already a dead man, Dante reasoned. Might as well try to take him with me.

Chen's body had almost entirely transformed into the Beastheads. The creature lashed out blindly at Dante, but didn't present an opening. Dante knew it would attack him with full force once the transformation was complete.

"Dante! Move!"

The shout saved Dante from doing something impetuous.

"Beryl?!"

Dante ran towards the Beastheads as fast as he could, weakly holding Rebellion in front of him like a bayonet. A single bullet whizzed through the air above his head.



"Auuuooohhh!" The demon roared as the enchanted bullet punched through its chest. The impact created a large hole that began to swallow magical energy in a powerful vortex.

A moment later, Dante arrived in front of the Beastheads and drove Rebellion into the hole. The impact destroyed the statue in a blinding crackle of energy. Chen's body crumbled into ash.

It was over almost before Dante's sword finished sliding home.

Dante collapsed with exhaustion.

"Jackpot."

Epilogue

"All I've got today are boring requests again," Dante complained. He was leaning back in his favorite chair at the Devil May Cry office, his feet propped up on an ebony desk. To the world at large, he was just a damned good mercenary with a colorfully embroidered story. He had enough jobs to keep him fed, but they all lacked a certain something.

Demons. They lacked demons.

"Give me a break," he muttered after reading a letter offering another peaceful job. "At this rate, my skills are gonna get rusty."

Several months had passed since the incident with Chen and the Beastheads. Someone had taken his place in the criminal underworld, which had returned to functioning normally, of course. Dante knew there were probably factional squabbles and power grabs among the less desirable, but he wasn't interested in such things.

After the final conflict, Dante had destroyed every last trace of Chen's demon labs. All of the research went up in flames, and he made sure the equipment was mangled beyond repair.

Beryl had disappeared soon afterward. Maybe she was fighting evil as a Devil Hunter somewhere, or maybe she had decided to put her demon-fighting days behind her with the destruction of the Beastheads. Either way, she hadn't gotten in touch.

She had given Dante her beloved rifle, which made him suspect she had slunk back to civilian life at last, having avenged her father. She had intended that he sell the weapon as compensation for the unpaid portion of his fee, but Dante kept it lying around the shop instead.

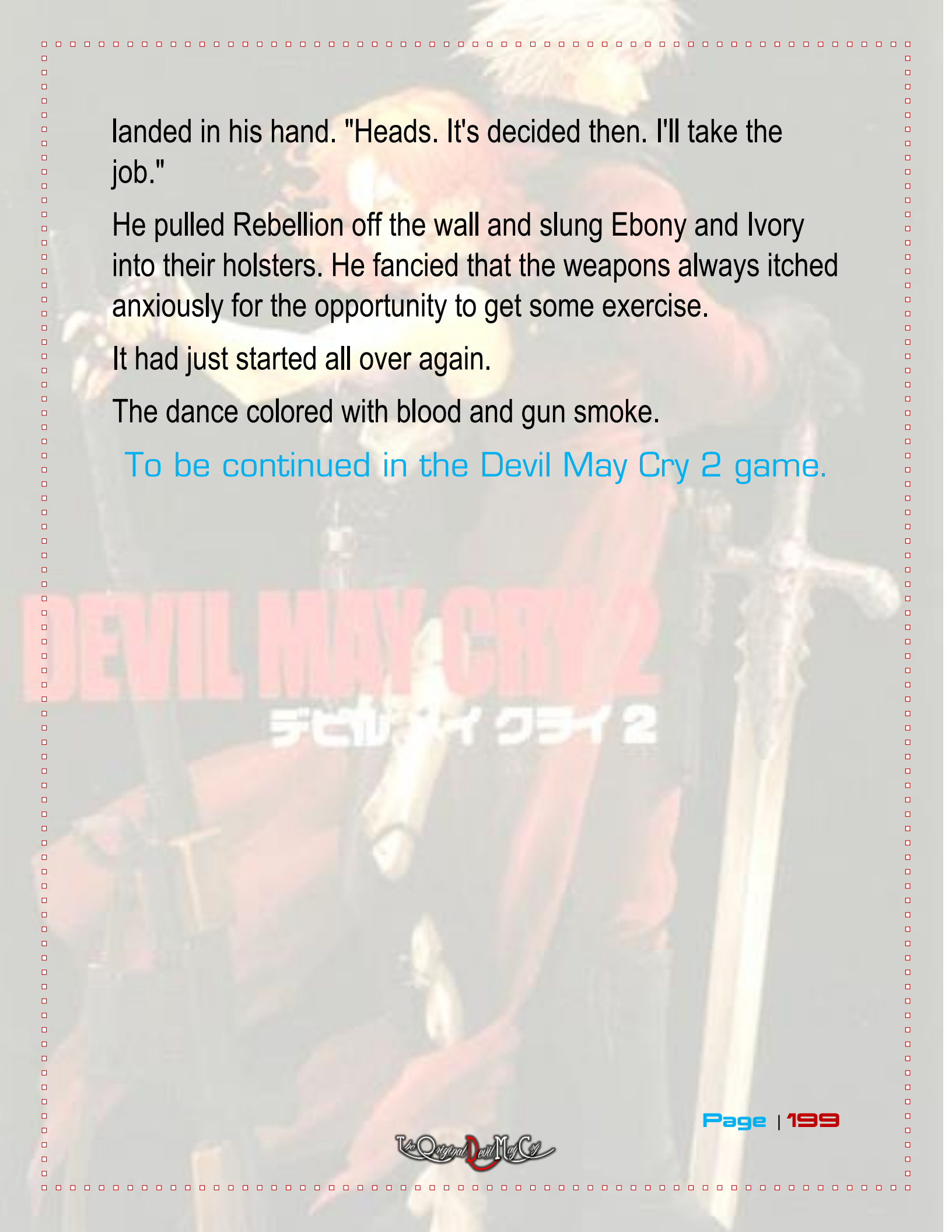
Dante was deep in contemplation when the front window shattered.

He scarcely had time to register the damage when a short white sword thudded onto his desk. A coarsely woven map was impaled halfway along its shaft.

Dante knew it was useless running outside to see who had thrown the weapon through the window. Nobody involved in this sort of thing ever sent a job offer the usual way.

"A museum," he mused, reading the map. "Another elaborate invitation."

Dante rolled a coin between his thumb and forefinger and then deftly flicked it into the air. It spun a few times and then

The background of the page is a faded, artistic rendering of Dante from Devil May Cry 2. He is shown from the waist up, wearing his signature red coat and black pants. He has his signature spiky blonde hair and is holding a sword in his right hand. The overall tone is dark and moody, with a focus on the character's iconic look.

landed in his hand. "Heads. It's decided then. I'll take the job."

He pulled Rebellion off the wall and slung Ebony and Ivory into their holsters. He fancied that the weapons always itched anxiously for the opportunity to get some exercise.

It had just started all over again.

The dance colored with blood and gun smoke.

To be continued in the Devil May Cry 2 game.

DEVIL MAY CRY 2
デビルマイクライ 2

いま、魔界への扉が
開かれようとしている――。

